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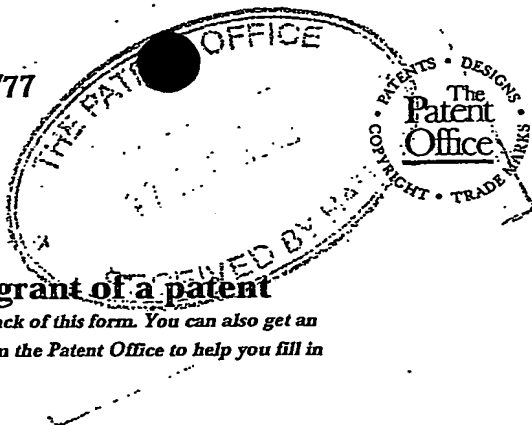
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3. Full name, address and postcode of the or of each applicant (underline all surnames)

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Patents ADP number (if you know it)

8224727002

If the applicant is a corporate body, give the country/state of its incorporation

United Kingdom

4. Title of the invention

IP-CAPABLE SWITCH

5. Name of your agent (if you have one)

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Abstract

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Signature

Date 17.04.02

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12. Name and daytime telephone number of person to contact in the United Kingdom

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IP-capable switch

The present invention relates to a line card interface, to a method of interfacing, to a method of
5 routing packets and to a routing device.

As used herein the term 'packet' refers to a fixed length cell (ATM cell or convenient sized segment of a variable length IP packet) with a pre-pended local header.

10

Herein the terms "distributor" and "demultiplexer" are used to signify similar devices, according to the context and function performed. A "deserialiser" has similarity to a demultiplexer, but has the function of converting bit-
15 serial data at one rate into bit-parallel data at a lower rate, while conserving the overall bit rate. A multiplexer and a serialiser are related in like fashion.

In the switches considered in this document, it is
20 convenient to combine multiplexing with deserialisation by time dividing bus access between multiple deserialisers to limit the bit rate on each line of the bus despite the increased aggregate bit rate caused by the multiplexing.

25 Conversely it is convenient to combine demultiplexing with serialisers, so high aggregate capacity traffic on an incoming bus may be 'distributed' to several outgoing serial lines. The high aggregate capacity required to keep many serial lines busy is therefore achieved without
30 increasing the speed of the electrical lines by conveying data as bit-parallel words over the many lines that compose the bus.

The size of the word is a design parameter with an upper limit equal to the cell size. For efficiency the cell size should not be too much greater than the minimum packet size encountered. A practical choice that accommodates IP packet size distributions is 512 bits, since that can also accommodate the 53 byte ATM cell. The width of the memory available is also a consideration.

10 The Internet is a communications network than conveys information in the form of packets having a payload of data having a header. The header contains the destination host address amongst other information about the packet.

15 Optical communications links are now capable of carrying data at 40 Gbit/s on a single channel. The use of wavelength division multiplexing (WDM) can easily provide more than 100 channels, giving an aggregate capacity of over 1 Tbit/s on a single fibre. The use of Vertical Cavity
20 Semiconductor Lasers (VCSELs) and plastic fibre ribbons, offers capacities of 2 Gbit/s per fibre and 32 Gbit/s per link (ribbon) at a price which is affordable at the level of the local area network (LAN).

25 To turn this raw bandwidth into usable network infrastructure, a new generation of multi-terabit routers is required. Multi-terabit capacities usually arise either because the router requires a very large number of modest capacity ports (i.e. an access node at the edge of the
30 network) or because it has a modest number of very high capacity ports (i.e. a super-router in the core of the network). Routers are located at the nodes of a network and

are required to forward data packets received on incoming links to the correct outgoing links. The traditional use of software running on high performance servers or specialised centralised CPU architectures is now the cause of a severe
5 bottleneck in the network.

Typically, variable length incoming packets are fragmented into convenient fixed size cells. These cells consist of a data payload having a routing tag. The routing
10 tag contains the destination port address. The contents of the routing tag are determined from the packet header via a routing-table look-up. This table is updated and maintained by the network layer processes, typically running in software.

15

A cell is, in essence, a fixed length packet with a local header. It is assumed the core switch of a router operates in a time slotted fashion where the duration of the time slot is equal to the duration of a cell and those
20 cells on different ports are temporally aligned.

It is fundamental that more than one packet arriving in the same time slot may contend for the same output port. Since only one packet can depart from that output port in a
25 time slot, it is necessary to store packets within a switch whilst they wait for their destination port to become free. Hence the core switch has a circuit switch setting a path between input port and output port, and buffer storage storing packets waiting in accordance with a suitable
30 queuing discipline. The requirement to store packets defines a key decision point when considering the scope for optoelectronic implementation. There is currently no practical optical memory. So-called "almost all-optical"

packet switches therefore use delay lines as buffers. These are limited in terms of numbers of buffers and buffer depth, although advantage can be taken of WDM technology to share buffers between packets on different wavelengths.

- 5 Another strategy is to use 'mad postman' or 'hot potato' routing where a packet that cannot be output on the correct port is output on any otherwise idle port. The idea here is that eventually the packet will be correctly routed at other nodes.

10

Effectively, all these buffering strategies are some form of deflection: in time, in wavelength, or in space, i.e. buffer memory/delay lines re-order packets in time; wavelength conversion re-orders packets in wavelength, a
15 space switch operating as a mad postman re-orders packets in space.

To address the need to develop a new generation of routers, a family of modular 'core switch' architectures
20 has been conceived. The form of the architectures is influenced by the following observations:

* Historically the emphasis in switch design has been on the minimisation of crosspoints and buffers. This leads
25 to the use of multistage switches and the avoidance of buffering strategies that scale as the square of the number of ports. The low cost of electronic memory means that this is no longer an issue and switches with a minimum of stages are now practical.

30

* Short interconnections with localised fan-out or fan-in are better implemented electronically. Long

interconnections with large numbers of crossovers are better implemented optically.

* Optical switches have the advantage of transparency that permits high-rate and format-independent transmission but are relatively slow to reconfigure and difficult to buffer. Electronic switches are opaque but offer fast switching and extensive buffering.

10 * Whilst the number of optoelectronic interfaces is a significant factor in the cost, the development of high density optical interconnect technology based on, for example, VCSELs is driving cost down justifying the greater use of optical pathways to enhance packet switch
15 performance.

The architectures that emerge have 'electronic islands' of common structure interconnected by fixed or reconfigurable optical pathways. The various different
20 architectures differ in their precise configuration and control, both of which are essentially a matter of software.

Larger switches may be built from a network of basic
25 switch modules. There are compelling reasons to make this network reconfigurable and so the same architecture emerges with the modules now replacing the 'electronic islands'. Intriguingly the core network is evolving towards a structure in which routers surround an ideally non-blocking
30 circuit-switched core that also logically has the same structure. Furthermore, an Internet Service Provider (ISP), although logically appearing as a node in the network, uses networks of smaller routers. The ISPs are finding it

necessary to increase the connectivity of their internal networks in order to handle increasing local traffic.

(Content providers are placing their servers close to the ISP. There is also local caching of remote content). Making
5 this internal network reconfigurable would allow the ISP to adapt to different traffic patterns by re-allocation of its resources. Again the same structure emerges.

A network topology may thus be envisaged that is self-
10 similar at all levels of aggregation: chip, router, ISP, core network. There appear to be connections between this observation and the recent discoveries that the Internet appears scale-less as a directed graph and that Internet traffic appears to obey self-similar statistics.

15

According to one aspect of the invention there is provided a line card interface device, in use interfacing between plural line cards of a digital data transmission network carrying non-balanced packet traffic at a given
20 line rate, said traffic having a statistical distribution which varies at a given variation rate, the interface device comprising an optical selector and a control device, the optical selector having plural interface inputs for connection to a first multi-path optical connection, plural
25 interface outputs for connection to a second multi-path optical connection, and plural optical paths connecting the interface inputs to the interface outputs, wherein the optical paths allow transfer of more packets per unit time than are incident per unit time at the plural interface
30 inputs, thereby providing speed-up, the optical selector further having a respective optical switch per path, each optical switch having a control input and responsive to control signals at the control input, the speed of response

being substantially less than said line rate, each said optical switch having a first state in which it enables its path and a second state in which it disables its path, and the control device having means for applying control
5 signals to the switch control inputs at a rate corresponding to the rate of statistical variation in traffic distribution.

The line card interface may thus operate on a slow
10 basis, thus enabling the use of switching devices incapable of high speed operation. The control device does not have to carry out fast scheduler calculations, and the interface may have very low power dissipation.

15 Advantageously the optical paths are spatially distinct and are greater in number than the number of the plural interface inputs to provide spatial speed-up.

Spatial speed-up may be achieved via optical means
20 with relative ease. The value of speed-up for an N input switch may be relatively low in embodiments of the invention, while retaining non-blocking behaviour.

The interface inputs and outputs may be sectorised to
25 reduce memory access contention, by dividing into input groups and output groups, each input group having a distributor, said distributor having one or more of said interface inputs and plural outputs, each output group having a multiplexer having an input, one or more interface
30 outputs, and the optical paths comprise an optical connection wherein each input group is connectable to each output group.

In embodiments, each input group has a respective input group memory, said distributor having plural outputs for writing to said input group memory and each output
5 group has a respective output group memory, said multiplexer input being connected to receive outputs from said output group memory.

In some embodiments, the optical connection comprises
10 an optical fibre device.

In others, the optical connection comprises optical components providing free-space paths in use.

15 Advantageous embodiments have each input group with the same number of inputs as the outputs of the output groups.

Each memory may be a dual-port memory having an input
20 port for writing to the memory and an output port for reading from the memory. This further reduces contention.

There may be provided latching circuitry for storing packet data prior to application to said multi-path optical
25 connections whereby said multi-path optical connections have a line rate reduced compared to said line rate.

According to a second aspect of the invention there is provided a method of interfacing between the optical inputs
30 and optical outputs of plural line cards of a digital data transmission network carrying non-balanced packet traffic at a given line rate, said traffic having a statistical variation, the method comprising:-

selecting between plural optical paths to provide a set of links between said optical inputs and optical outputs, the plural optical paths extending between the plural outputs of each line card and the plural optical inputs of each other line card, wherein said paths allow transfer of more packets per unit time than are incident per unit time at the plural interface inputs, thereby providing speed-up;

10 varying said selection at a rate corresponding to the rate of statistical variation in traffic distribution.

Preferably the interface inputs and outputs are divided into input groups and output groups, each input group having a distributor, one or more interface inputs and a plurality of outputs, each output group having a multiplexer, one or more interface outputs and said plurality of inputs, and the optical paths comprise an optical transpose connection wherein each input group is connectable to each output group.

Preferably again said step of varying comprises: providing a desired traffic matrix;

constructing a service matrix with integer entries in units of the internal link rate and that has row and column sums equal to the said plurality is constructed such that in these units each of its entries exceeds the corresponding entry in the desired traffic matrix;

decomposing the service matrix into its constituent permutations and controlling said links using said permutations.

Such an algorithm is readily automated and carried out at slow speeds.

5 The constructing step may comprise calculating the nearest integer greater than each entry of the traffic matrix represented in units of the line rate and then incrementing the entries with the least excess service rate until the matrix satisfies the row and column sums requirement.

10

An especially simple solution is where the plurality is a power of two.

15 The matrix may be calculated, predefined or estimated from information derived from queues at said line card inputs or outputs.

20 According to another aspect of the invention, there is provided a routing device to balance packet traffic, the device having a first plurality of input ports and a first plurality of output ports, packet traffic being incident at said input ports, the device comprising a first-third stages in series, the first and third stages each having said plurality of deserialisers, said plurality of
25 multiplexers, and a fixed transpose connection, each deserialiser having at least one input and said plurality of outputs, said at least one input forming a respective one of said input ports, each multiplexer having said plurality of inputs and at least one output, said at least
30 one output forming a respective one of said output ports, and each fixed transpose connection connecting respective outputs of each deserialiser to a respective input of each multiplexer, and the second stage having said plurality of

sets of packet data queues, each set of packet data queues comprising said plurality of queues, each set being disposed to receive data from a respective multiplexer of the first stage and to furnish data to a respective
5 deserialiser of the third stage.

According to a further aspect of the invention there is provided a method of routing packet traffic using a device having a number of input ports and said number of
10 output ports, the method comprising:

applying packet traffic at said input ports,
deserialising signals at each input port to provide first intermediate signals, said first intermediate signals being disposed in a group of said number of signals
15 associated with each input port, whereby said number of groups is formed;

transposing said first intermediate signals among said groups to provide transposed groups containing one first intermediate signal from each said group and multiplexing
20 together the transposed groups of first intermediate signals, to provide said number of second intermediate signals;

distributing said second intermediate signals among said number of queue storage locations according to the
25 output port of the second intermediate signal;

selecting data from said storage locations and serially outputting data from locations for sequential output ports;

deserialising said serially output data to provide
30 third intermediate signals, said third intermediate signals being disposed in a group of said number of signals, whereby said number of groups is formed;

transposing said third intermediate signals among said groups to provide transposed groups containing one third intermediate signal from each said group and multiplexing together the transposed groups of third intermediate signals, to provide said number of output signals at said output ports.

Preferably the method includes latching packet data prior to said transposing step interface inputs whereby optical connections in said transposing steps have a line rate reduced compared to an external line rate.

Exemplary embodiments of the invention will now be described with reference to the accompanying drawings in which:-

Figure 1(a) shows a schematic diagram of a crossbar with no connections;

Figure 1(b) shows a schematic diagram of a crossbar with nine connections set up:

(0,8), (1,4), (2,1), (3,6), (4,1), (5,3), (6,2), (7,7), (8,5);

Figure 2 shows a schematic diagram of an output-queued packet switch;

Figure 3 shows a schematic diagram of an output-queued switch with fan-out, transpose interconnection, and fan-in into output buffers with the crosspoint switches shown as dots;

Figure 4 shows a schematic diagram of a broadcast-select switch using buffered fan-in, with the crosspoint switches shown as dots;

Figure 5 shows a schematic diagram of a broadcast-select switch having crosspoint buffered fan-in, with the crosspoint switches shown as dots;

Figure 6 shows a schematic diagram of a functional
5 description of dual-port memory;

Figure 7 shows a schematic diagram of a centralised shared memory switch and buffer;

Figure 8 shows a schematic diagram of a fan-in buffer;

Figure 9 shows a functional equivalent of the
10 electronic implementation of a fan-in buffer;

Figure 10 shows a schematic diagram of a route-select switch with buffered fan-in;

Figure 11 shows a schematic diagram of an input-queued packet switch;

15 Figure 12 shows a schematic diagram of a virtual output-queued packet switch;

Figure 13 shows a schematic diagram of a virtual output-queued switch showing detail of the crossbar;

Figure 14 shows a schematic diagram of a route-select
20 switch with buffered fan-out;

Figure 15 shows a functional equivalent of the electronic implementation of a fan-out buffer;

Figure 16 shows a schematic diagram of a centralised shared memory switch with queue organised as crosspoint
25 queues;

Figure 17 shows a schematic diagram of a centralised shared memory switch with split buffers;

Figure 18 shows a schematic diagram of a centralised shared memory switch with crosspoint buffers organised as a
30 cascade of virtual output queues and virtual input queues;

Figure 19 shows a schematic diagram of a sectorised centralised shared memory switch with one input port per input sector and one output port per output sector;

Figure 20 shows a schematic diagram of a sectorised centralised shared memory switch with one input port per input sector and one output port per output sector and the demultiplexer / deserialisers and multiplexers / serialisers of the central transpose interconnection explicitly shown;

Figure 21 shows a schematic diagram of a 256x256 optical transpose interconnection;

Figure 22 shows a schematic diagram of a sectorised centralised shared memory switch with two input ports per input sector and two output ports per output sector;

Figure 23 shows a schematic diagram of a sectorised centralised shared memory switch with two input ports per input sector and two output ports per output sector, with the buffers re-ordered to explicitly show the multiple links within each arm of the inter-sector transpose

interconnection;

Figure 24 shows a schematic diagram of a sectorised centralised shared memory switch with shared pathways;

Figure 25 shows a schematic diagram of a sectorised centralised shared memory switch with shared pathways and grouped multiplexers, having connections re-ordered to group links together within the arms of the inter-sector transpose interconnection;

Figure 26 shows a schematic diagram of a three stage Clos-like packet switch;

Figure 27 shows a schematic diagram of the logical equivalent of the sectorised switch using crosspoint queues;

Figure 28 shows a schematic diagram of a combined input-queued and output-queued crossbar packet switch;

Figure 29 shows a schematic diagram of temporal multiplexing of permutations by spatial selection of
5 central crossbars;

Figure 30 shows a schematic diagram of a load balanced input-queued crossbar packet switch;

Figure 31 shows a schematic diagram of a load balanced input-queued crossbar packet switch with crossbars expanded
10 as route and select switches; and

Figure 32 shows a schematic diagram of a parallel packet switch.

In the various figures, like reference numerals refer
15 to like parts.

Early packet routers were formed by a processor card and line interface cards plugged into a shared backplane. The need to access the processor through the backplane
20 limited the throughput of such devices, and to mitigate this, a later packet router provided the processing device in the line card. Other routers include switched backplane routers.

25 Such devices are all-electronic, and this tends to limit capacity.

So-called "fourth generation" routers embody optical transmission for the first time. In these devices,
30 connections from a switch core to line cards are via optical fibre links. Line cards in these routers are sophisticated devices capable of the rapid and complex

processing operations needed to convey up to the order of 10 terabits per second, as needed for the Internet.

5 An undesirable feature of core switches of routers is the phenomenon of blocking. Blocking occurs where for example a packet is to be routed to an output of a router when that output is already carrying traffic. Blocking also occurs where a traffic-carrying link of the switch is required for carrying further traffic at the same time.

10

A known circuit topology for avoiding blocking in a switching network was evolved by Clos, albeit in the context of circuit switching. The Clos topology is normally a three stage switch, each stage consisting of crossbar
15 modules. However a five-stage switch Clos switch may be constructed by substituting three-stage Clos switches for the crossbar modules of the centre stage of the original three-stage switch. This process may be iterated to form multi-stage switches. The current state of the art
20 frequently refers to Clos-type switches, in the packet context. Such switches use speed-up which may be temporal, frequency or spatial.

In a typical router, there are two circuit modules
25 sandwiching a core switch, namely an input module and an output module. The input module contains input processing circuitry which receives the incoming packets at the line rate, the input processing circuitry containing a header recognition part which examines the packet header to decide
30 the final port destination and creates a local header for use in the core switch, and the input processing circuitry also splits the incoming packets into segments of a fixed width selected according to some criterion, e.g. no greater

than the memory width, and adds the local header to each segment before storing each segment in a buffer, for output to input ports of the core switch.

5 At the output of the core switch the output module contains output processing circuitry that collects the segments from the core switch and stores the segments in buffers. The output processing circuitry then reassembles the input packet after removing the local headers. The
10 input module and output module may be part of the line card.

 If in a timeslot at most N packets arrive at a stage but up to $k \cdot N$ packets can be transferred to following
15 stages via an inter-stage interconnect, then the inter-stage interconnect has a speed-up of k . The speed-up may be provided in time, space or frequency (equivalently wavelength in the context of an optical interconnect) or by these in combination. In time, it is provided by running
20 the links at sufficient speed (i.e. by transporting packets within sub-slots of a time-division-multiplex of the timeslot). In space it is provided by equipping the interconnect with a sufficient number of physical links (i.e. a space-division-multiplex of the inter-stage
25 interconnect) and in frequency (wavelength) it is provided by a sufficient number of frequency (wavelength) channels within each physical link, i.e. by frequency-division-multiplexing, or equivalently wavelength division multiplexing.

30

 In summary, if the interconnect has A physical links each carrying B frequency/wavelength channels each running at C packets per timeslot (i.e. there are C sub-slots), the

speed-up is $k=A*B*C/N$. Equivalently there are $A*B*C=k*N$ logical links each transporting one packet per timeslot but these logical links may be implemented in a different number of physical links using time /space /frequency
5 (wavelength) multiplexing techniques.

Extra flexibility is offered by the fact that packets may be transmitted as w -bit words using w channels in parallel, c.f. 30Gbit/s VCSEL links employing fibre ribbons
10 with 12 fibres each operating at 2.5Gbit/s. In embodiments of the invention herein described bit serial ($w=1$) transmission is employed over physical links containing one wavelength channel operating at a speed of one packet per timeslot (the timeslot is then defined by the packet length
15 divided by the bit-rate of the link) - but the invention is not restricted to this.

Output-queued switches

20 Figure 1 shows a crossbar circuit switch, which logically comprises a set of nine row lines and an intersecting set of nine column lines with switching elements at every intersection. By turning on selected switches (see Figure 1b) any desired connection regime may
25 be provided. Referring to Figure 2, a first type of packet switch is equivalent to a crossbar circuit switch 1 similar to that of Figure 1 having row inputs 3 and column outputs 4, and equipped with buffer stores 2 at its output that queue packets for transmission. Such a switch is effective
30 in that it may be implemented as work conserving, with 100% throughput, and with minimal packet wait times.

A disadvantage of many output-queued switches is that the switches operate N times faster than the line rate to avoid blocking, where N is the number of input ports. Non-blocking behaviour as a circuit switch, together with a
5 time speed-up k defined by $k = N$ prevents contention within the switch, even in the extreme case that all N packets at the input contend for the same output port.

Referring again to Figure 1, it will be seen that each
10 input (row) is distributed (fanned-out) to each crosspoint in a row. Conversely the outputs of each crosspoint in each column are combined (fanned-in) into each output.

Referring to Figure 3, the switch of Figure 2 has been
15 redrawn with the switches of the crossbar 1 shown as dots 5. The fan-out is shown as 6 and the fan-in as 7; the interconnection 8 between the fan-out and the fan-in (an interconnection in which each input is available to each output) is termed a transpose interconnection.

20

It is important to note that all paths are present in any physical implementation of a crossbar, electronic or optical. The paths that are unwanted are either not used (route and select switches) or are ignored (broadcast and
25 select). Moreover optical fan-in typically requires the same area of photo-detector as the use of multiple photo-detectors and electronic fan-in. The silicon occupied by multiple receiver circuitry however is an issue. The
30 important point is that sufficiently low cost opto-electronic interfaces exist. Moreover the fact that all optical pathways exist in any case favours the use of more transmitters / receivers and intelligent electronic fan-out / fan-in to avoid unnecessary contention.

The required speed-up can be alternatively achieved by replacing the simple fan-in with a following high speed buffer 2 by a multiple input buffer 9, as shown in Figure 5 4.

A multiple input buffer may be implemented as several single input buffers 10 followed by a multiplexer switch 11 appropriately controlled to emulate a single queue as shown 10 in Figure 5. This is as a switch using crosspoint buffers, and the technique is herein referred to as virtual input queuing (VIQ) since a queue for each input is being maintained at each output.

15 In practice, a single dual-port memory chip is used to implement the buffers common to a particular output. Functionally a dual-port memory chip appears as a sandwich of two large switches 12, 14 and the storage medium 16. One large switch 12 having a parallel input 13 serves to select 20 the memory write location, and the other 14, having a parallel output 15, selects the read location, as shown in Figure 6.

Functional description of dual-port memory

25

The memory may be efficiently organised as several queues by queuing pointers to the locations where packets have been stored rather than by directly queuing the packets themselves. This may be implemented either as a 30 linked list or by using multiple pointers. In a typical linked list, segments of a data item are stored in memory, with all locations (except that relating to the last segment) also storing an indication of storage location of

the next segment, so enabling ready access to all segments. In such arrangements, the first segment is typically accessed by a pointer storing data indicative of the location of its head and tail. In a multiple pointer
5 system, segments of a data item may be stored in memory at different locations. The address or data capable of indicating the address of each of those locations is also stored as a succession of pointers in an ordered store, and such that the head and tail of each succession is given a
10 respective further pointer. The memory is shared between plural serial inputs by time division multiplexing plural serial to parallel converters onto the memory write-side data bus. Although for the purposes of the present discussion only one serial output is required, time
15 multiplexing plural parallel to serial converters on the read-side data bus may provide plural serial outputs. Functionally this is equivalent to placing a multiplexer 18 and demultiplexer 20 either side of the memory of Figure 6, as shown in Figure 7.

20

A fan-in buffer shown in Figure 8 may therefore actually be implemented electronically as shown in Figure 9, with a large switch 12 fed via a parallel line 13 from a multiplexer 24, the output of the switch 12 feeding the
25 storage locations of the memory 16 and the output port of the memory 16 going via a switch 14.

Functionally the block 23 comprising the connection of the demultiplexer 24 and the large switch 12 (shown in the
30 figure within the dotted box) is an identity and should be transparent to the user, although there is an implicit serial-to-parallel conversion. The single bit-parallel path 13 is a bottleneck introduced by the electronic

implementation. This bottleneck limits the incoming line rate to the memory bandwidth divided by the number of inputs. (Memory bandwidth is typically of the order of 80 Gbit/s, and will typically be higher where the memory write-side data bus is kept on-chip, i.e. by close integration of the deserialiser and multiplexer with the memory.)

Figure 5 with the buffers implemented as in Figure 9 and the fan-out and transpose interconnection implemented optically constitutes the simple optical fan-out / electronic fan-in (SOFO) architecture disclosed in GB patent application 2357656. The fan-out and transposition can be seen to simply replicate the inputs and may be more simply implemented using multiple imaging optics, e.g. holographic gratings or holograms. The crosspoint switches may be packet filters that only pass packets addressed to the output port associated with that crosspoint.

Grouping several queues together may make savings in electronic hardware. That is, the queues for more than one output are implemented within the same physical memory shared between more than one output using a demultiplexer as in Figure 7.

25

Grouping provides an extra saving because the per-port memory that is required for a given packet loss rate (buffer overflow) is smaller for a grouped queue. There is also a reduction in the optical fan-out required. The penalty is that the control overhead increases with the number of grouped queues.

30

A disadvantage of this architecture is the large number of photo-receivers required which may dominate the cost and another is the fact that the electronic fan-in circuitry must cope with peak data rates equal to the total switch capacity. The peak rate can be limited using knockout. Knockout is a process of discarding packets without significant detriment to packet loss rates in order to limit peak bandwidth. However, users do not favour knockout.

10

Whether this architecture is useful depends on the control overhead. If the control overhead does not limit the degree of grouping, then grouping all the outputs together and dispensing with the optics is a solution that reduces cost for the same performance, i.e. one large electronic centralised shared memory switch. It is important to note that this conclusion only remains valid whilst it is necessary to insert the bottleneck illustrated in Figure 9.

20

Another variant of this architecture is obtained by moving the crosspoint switches 5 of Figure 5 to the input of the transpose interconnection. The combination of the localised fan-out followed by the crosspoint switches is a one-to-N switch. The result is the buffered route-and-select switch shown in Figure 10, having each input fed via a switch 26 to provide fanned-out switch outputs 106, the switch 26 having the function of the crosspoint switches 5 and fan-out 6 of Figure 5. Once again virtual input queuing is used.

30

Placing the crosspoint switches immediately behind the fan-out operation implies that the fan-out is now performed electrically rather than optically. If the transpose interconnection is to be implemented optically, this
5 implies a large number of both optical transmitters and receivers. This is an increase of optoelectronic hardware and hence cost compared to the simple optical fan-out / electronic fan-in (SOFO) architecture disclosed in GB patent application 2357656.

10

Input-queued Switches

An alternative to output queuing is to place the queues at the input of the switching fabric as shown in
15 Figure 11. No temporal speed-up is then required: the switch fabric only has to work at the line rate.

One problem with input queuing with a simple first-in first-out queuing discipline is that packets wait for the
20 relevant destination to become free. This holds up the progress of any packets behind it, even if their destinations are free. This effect is known as head-of-line blocking and it limits the maximum throughput of the switch to 56% for balanced Bernoulli traffic: for other traffic
25 patterns the throughput is likely to be lower.

Methods of ameliorating this effect involve changing the queuing discipline so those packets having a free destination are allowed to jump the queue. A device known
30 as a packet scheduler selects packets for switching according to a scheduling algorithm. The scheduling algorithm must complete this task within the time slot. Existence proofs exist for scheduling algorithms that are

capable of 100% throughput. In practice a few iterations are performed of an iterative approximation to the ideal scheduler with varying degrees of success. The penalty is a considerable increase in control complexity that could ultimately be the limiting factor on throughput. Self-evidently where such measures are taken, packets are no longer guaranteed to depart the router in the same order that they arrived.

10 The scheduling problem is simplified if a queue 28 is maintained in dual-port stores 30, (each having a demultiplexer 29 and a multiplexer 31) at each input for every output port. This popular method of input queuing is known as virtual output queuing (VOQ) and is illustrated
15 schematically in Figure 12. Note that for each output 4a-4d, the memories each hold a corresponding queue 28a-28d. A total of N^2 short queues rather than N longer queues is provided, so there is little extra cost in terms of memory which is cheap in any case. There is however an overhead
20 in, for example, managing a large number of queue pointers. The queues associated with a particular input may be located at a line card placed a moderate distance from the switch fabric. In that case queue status information must be signalled to a centralised scheduler controlling the
25 fabric, which adds to the control overhead. Typically the required information indicates the time the packets at the head of each queue have spent in the queue.

 If possible the oldest packet amongst the queues
30 corresponding to each output is scheduled for transmission. If more than one oldest packet resides at an input only one amongst them can be scheduled. The choice is made in some fair manner.

If more than one oldest packet resides at a single input from a set of inputs, there will be another input in the set at which no oldest packet resides. To avoid a null, a less old packet is scheduled instead from that input. This ensures that one packet is scheduled from each input that has queues with content, thereby ensuring no loss of throughput. It is clear, however, that packets do not necessarily leave on a first-in, first-out basis.

10

Provided the speed of operation is not compromised by the control complexity, input queuing permits the highest possible line rate, limited only by the technology. If the speed-up is achieved temporally, the line rate is reduced below the limit of the technology in output queuing by the speed-up factor. This accounts for the popularity of the virtual output queuing system in all-electronic implementations.

20 Referring to Figure 13, expanding the crossbar 1 to show the logical elements, namely fan-out 6 and switches 25, makes it clear that the simple fan-out within the crossbar is the source of the scheduling problem.

25 The scheduling problem disappears completely if the multiplexers 31 and fan-out operation 6 are replaced by a direct connection 32 as shown in Figure 14. This can again be recognised as a form of cross-point queuing but with the cross-points and buffers placed on the input side of the transpose interconnection.

30

An implementation using electronic memory technology necessarily means that the buffers corresponding to a particular input functionally appear as in Figure 15, showing the dual-port store 34 feeding a demultiplexer 36.

5

Again, as with Figure 9, functionally the block 35 containing the output multiplexer 33 of the store and the demultiplexer 36 (shown within the dotted box) is an identity and should be transparent to the user, although there is an implicit parallel to serial conversion. The single (bit-parallel) path in the middle is a bottleneck introduced by the electronic implementation, which limits the outgoing line rate to the memory bandwidth divided by the number of outputs to the memory.

15

Grouping several queues together may make savings in electronic hardware. That is, the queues for more than one input are implemented within the same physical memory shared between the inputs using a multiplexer as in Figure 7.

20

Grouping provides an extra saving because the per-port memory that is required for a given packet loss rate, due to buffer overflow, is smaller for a grouped queue. There is also a reduction in the number of optical pathways required. The penalty is that the control overhead increases with the number of grouped queues.

25

A disadvantage of this architecture is the large number of sources required which may dominate the cost. The second stage multiplexers may be identical to the fan-in buffer shown in Figure 9. Control may then be localised to the electronic islands only if it is not required to

30

strictly emulate an output-queued switch. Alternatively, it is feasible to use simple electrical fan-in following gated photo-receivers or even optical fan-in with gated sources. Information is then signalled from each island to the
5 scheduler that controls the gates.

10 Centralised shared memory switch

Figure 16 shows a centralised shared memory switch 40 with queues 42 organised as crosspoint queues of a dual-port memory 43 having write circuitry 44, functioning as a
15 demultiplexer, and read circuitry 45 functioning as a multiplexer. The input demultiplexer 44 has its inputs from a multiplexer 46 and the output multiplexer 45 feeds a demultiplexer 48. Thus the buffers shown in the centre form the queues for packets that arrive on a given input port
20 and that are destined for a given output port. Hence, for a switch there are data flows, e.g. queues, each corresponding to a unique input-port/output-port pair.

The centralised shared memory switch may be understood
25 first as an extension of a time-division-multiplexed (TDM) crossbar switch -see Figure 7. Such a switch operates by writing out the contents of a TDM frame in an order different to the order in which the contents are read-in. Placed between a TDM multiplexer and demultiplexer this is
30 equivalent to a space switch. Because a whole frame must be stored before its components can be re-arranged, there is a latency of one frame time. In the case of a packet switch, packets must be retained within a switch whilst they wait

for the destination port to be free. This can be simply achieved by increasing the storage to accommodate deeper buffers, for example managed using pointers as described earlier.

5

A problem for the centralised shared memory switches is memory access contention that corresponds to the bottleneck evident in Figure 16 as the single bit-parallel link 47 connecting the input multiplexer and the write-side memory and as the single bit-parallel link 49 connecting the output demultiplexer and the read-side memory. In practice both these links are bit-parallel data busses. The memory bandwidth is therefore shared between the inputs and outputs so that the total capacity is unchanged by the number of inputs or outputs.

Advantages of a centralised shared memory switch are:

- 1) it exactly emulates an output-queued switch,
- 2) its grouped queues are very memory efficient, and
- 20 3) a variety of non-FIFO queuing disciplines are simply implemented to offer quality of service guarantees.

For simplicity, queues discussed herein are organised as crosspoint queues with a first-in first-out queuing discipline. It is important to note that plural virtual input queues corresponding to a particular output port with the fan-in multiplexer selecting, for example, the oldest cell at the head of the queues for departure, are equivalent to a single queue with a push-in first-out queuing discipline. A multiplexer controlled in an appropriate manner can select cells according to other queuing disciplines, for example, weighted fair queuing (WFQ). Conversely, a group of virtual output queues

corresponding to a particular input port are equivalent to a single queue that implements the first-in push-out discipline. In this discipline, cell order for each output is preserved but cells destined for a particular output may depart before earlier-arriving cells destined for another output.

Further flexibility is offered by the fact that the input port multiplexers and output port demultiplexers need not be located physically close to the centralised shared memory switch and may be composed of multiple stages. They can even be thought of logically rather than physically, so for example a particular input port might then correspond to a particular traffic classification. Hence, the crosspoint queues then queue traffic flows that are classified on the basis of source/destination and traffic type (e.g. multi-media, or data files) or service type (e.g. assured forwarding, expedited forwarding, best efforts). This can be done by routers at the edge of the network using information (e.g. TCP headers) found within the payload in addition to that found in the IP header. Ideally, there is a separate queue for each source/host and traffic type. However if this were implemented within the core of the network, the number of queues would be excessive. It is thus better to buffer traffic of the same type aggregated over many source / host pairs.

Sectorisation

The bottleneck caused by memory write-access and read-access contention may be alleviated by the process of sectorisation. The first step in the process is to split the buffers into two half-queues in series as shown

in Figure 17. This leaves the switch functionally unaltered, provided the service rate from the first half-queue equals or exceeds the peak service rate from the second half queue.

5

The switch further remains functionally unaltered by organising the crosspoint buffers by input port on the input side and by output port on the output side. The preservation of a one-to-one connection between the buffer
10 pairs despite the re-ordering leads to a transpose interconnection 54 between the split buffer pairs as shown in Figure 18.

Effectively the first half of the split buffers are
15 organised as virtual output queues and the second half of the split buffers are organised as virtual input queues. This permits the splitting of the write-side 45 and read-side 44 switches into per-input switches 55,56 without change of function, as shown in Figure 19.

20

Figure 19 can be recognised as a set of fan-out buffers connected to a set of fan-in buffers via a transpose interconnection. It is a buffered version of a route-select circuit switch. In practice, the fan-in
25 buffers and fan-out buffers are implemented electronically using the information from Figures 9 and 15 respectively to achieve what is shown in Figure 20. A transpose interconnection may be implemented optically as shown in Figure 21. An optical transpose interconnection is
30 disclosed in WO 215633 (PCT/GB01/03643).

Both write-access and read-access memory contention is eliminated in this architecture, as the full memory bandwidth is available to each input and output. The penalty is the N^2 transmitters and receivers required by the optical transpose interconnection.

Hardware savings may be made by grouping queues into sectors at the input and at the output, with the input and output sectors connected by connection arms. An arm is the set of links that connect an input sector to a single output sector. However the technique of grouping has the cost of reintroducing memory access contention, as memory access is now shared between the members of the group. In the general case, the group sizes at the input and at the output may be different. However, the maximum group size is determined by the memory bandwidth that is likely to be the same for all the sectors which favours a symmetric arrangement. Figure 22 shows a symmetric case of a 4x4 switch with two inputs per sectors and two outputs per sector. In this switch each input is fed to a respective per sector multiplexer 60, and the bit-parallel outputs fed to a switch similar to Figure 19, having per-sector input demultiplexer 55, buffer 52,53 and transpose 54. The outputs comprise a per-sector output multiplexer 56 and a per-sector output demultiplexer 62. Figure 23 is derived from Figure 22 with the buffers re-ordered to more clearly show the multiple links within each arm of the transpose interconnection between the sectors.

For a $N \times N$ switch having N^2 queues, there are N^2 paths between the N^2 queues, each formed as a split buffer. In each time slot at most N packets are conveyed between input queues and output queues, and therefore the speed-up factor

of this switch is equal to N . A lesser speed-up factor can however still prevent internal congestion.

If there are n input ports per input sector and n output ports per output sector, then there are N/n input sectors, N/n output sectors. There are $(N/n) * (N/n)$ arms connecting the input queues to the output queues for example via a transpose interconnect. A necessary condition to avoid congestion in the input sectors is that the total number of pathways between the input sectors and output sectors must be at least N . Assuming the links are distributed uniformly over the arms, the number l of links per arm is bounded by the relation (1) below:

$$(n^2/N) \leq l \leq n^2 \text{-----} (1)$$

(where n is the number of input ports per input sector and the number of output ports per output sector, N is the minimum number of pathways between input and output sectors and l is the number of links per arm).

For convenience the capacity of each link is taken as one packet per time slot. A trade-off can be made between time, space and even wavelength. A fractional space link therefore may be a link running at a lower speed. Conversely multiple links can be time-division-multiplexed onto a single higher speed link. A traffic matrix is a matrix having elements formed by the offered load between each input port and output port. A traffic matrix is admissible if the traffic does not overload any input port or output port of an ideal switch. The number l of links per arm need be no greater than n to support any admissible traffic matrix.

Balanced traffic is defined as the case where packets arriving at each and every input port have destination addresses uniformly distributed over the output ports. For balanced traffic, each of the arms of the transpose interconnection carries at most n^2/N packets per time slot. Therefore so long as $n^2 \leq N$, i.e. $n \leq N^{1/2}$, a single link can carry balanced traffic.

Returning to the general traffic situation, the number m of output ports from an input sector and the number m of input ports to an output sector is given by equation (2):

$$m = N \cdot l / n = k * n \text{ ----- (2)}$$

(where k is the speed-up)

Where the memory bandwidth is B packets per time slot, the sector port dimensions are bounded by relation (3):

$$n, m \leq B \text{ ----- (3)}$$

Hence the maximum number of ports per sector, and maximum overall switch size are determined by equations (4) and (5):

$$n = B/k \text{ ----- (4)}$$

$$N = k n^2 / l \text{ ----- (5)}$$

It is convenient to choose $N = n^2$, and the number l of links in each arm to be equal to the speed-up k . A smaller number of links per arm allows a larger switch but the switch performance is traffic dependent for:

$$1 \leq l < n \text{ ----- (6)}$$

It is therefore possible to economise on the number of links, and hence on the optoelectronic hardware, by sharing a reduced number of links within each arm between the corresponding queue buffers.

5

Any admissible traffic matrix may be supported if the equation (7) is satisfied:

$$l = n \text{ ----- (7)}$$

10 This strategy is illustrated in Figure 24 having two two-input demultiplexers 64 feeding input queues 65, four two-output multiplexers 66 feeding the queue outputs via an interconnect 67 to four two-input demultiplexers 68 having output queues 69 at their outputs, and two output per-
15 sector multiplexers 70 receiving the output queues. With better use of hardware, this is redrawn as Figure 25.

For $l < n$, as noted above, in (6) the switch is traffic dependent. However, the traffic dependence may be removed
20 by adaptively reconfiguring the interconnection so that the number of links within each arm is sufficient to support the inter-sector traffic.

Referring to Figure 26 a Clos-like three stage switch
25 has four input stages 200-203, and four output stages 204-207 connected together by an optical interconnection network having eight reconfigurable optical cross-connect devices 210-217. Each cross-connect has the functionality of a crossbar. Thus $N=16$ and $n=4$. The input and output
30 stages have the structure of the centralised shared memory switch of Figure 16, modified to take account of the difference between the numbers of inputs and outputs of these stages to provide spatial speed-up. They thus

provide electronic storage of the relevant queues. The input stages each have eight VCSEL outputs 220 and the output stages each have eight photodiode input stages. Thus $n=8$, and there is a speed-up of $k=2$. The optical cross-connect devices each have four inputs and four outputs. A first network 223 of optical fibres connects the outputs of the input stages to the inputs of the optical cross-connect devices 210-217, with each input stage connected via one fibre to each cross-connect. A second network 224 of optical fibres connects the outputs of the optical cross-connect devices 210-217, to the inputs of the output stages 204-7 in like fashion. By inspection of Figure 26, the number l of links per arm is given by $l=2$. Thus a number of 'electronic islands' surrounds an optical switch fabric. In an alternative embodiment, the reconfigurable elements are formed as further electronic islands formed as TDM switches. This however would be at the cost of further optical-to-electronic and electronic-to-optical conversions. The TDM switches of this alternative embodiment also have the structure of the centralised shared memory switch of Figure 16.

In the described embodiment therefore, with $l=2$ and $n=4$, clearly $l < n$.

25

As a circuit switch the embodiment is rearrangeably non-blocking for a speed-up of unity. The term "rearrangeably non-blocking" as applied to switching networks, covers networks which rely upon the fact that while there may not be a path available, one can be opened up by moving some of the other signals to different paths. This can be done without any loss or disconnection of existing signals, by setting up each new path, and

switching to it before removing the old path.

A suitable scheduling algorithm can therefore ensure congestion-free operation for any non-stationary admissible traffic matrix. A speed-up factor of $k=2$ offers strictly non-blocking operation as a circuit switch and hence will simplify the scheduling algorithm. Congestion-free operation then only requires the central stage to reconfigure on a time scale that characterises the statistical traffic variation.

Furthermore, it has been shown that there exists a scheduling algorithm that permits a combined input and output-queued switch to emulate perfectly an ideal output-queued switch. In practice economic considerations and expected traffic statistics might lead to switches having central stages with some fixed paths (e.g. provided by fixed optical transpose), some semi-permanent reconfigurable paths (e.g. provided by FELC shutters) and some rapidly reconfigurable paths (e.g. by electronic TDM switches with optoelectronic interfaces).

It is interesting to note that the Internet is evolving towards a structure in which routers surround a circuit switched core that is ideally non-blocking and therefore topologically similar to Figure 26. Furthermore, larger switches themselves topologically similar to Figure 26 can be constructed using switch modules identical to Figure 26. The properties of these self-similar networks are currently under investigation.

Centralised shared memory switches are known to emulate ideal output-queued switches. They support the variety of queuing disciplines required to implement quality of service guarantees. Their limitation is that
5 memory access contention limits the switch capacity to the memory bandwidth independent of the number of ports.

Figure 27 shows the logical structure of a sectorised switch derived from the centralised shared memory switch of
10 Figure 16. This logical structure corresponds to the physical structure shown in Figure 26. The derivation proceeds as follows:

1. The individual cross-point queues are divided into
15 pair of half-queues 80,82 connected in series on either side of a central dividing plane.

2. The half-queues on the input side of the dividing plane are ordered first by input port and second by output
20 port. The half-queues on the output side of the dividing plane are ordered first by output port and second by input port. This introduces a transpose interconnection in the centre that preserves the series connection between corresponding pairs of half-queues. The half-queues on the
25 input side may be thought of as virtual output queues. The half-queues on the output side may be called virtual input queues.

3. The write-side deserialiser-multiplexer-switch
30 (TDM receiver shift registers on the write-side memory bus) is sectorised into independent smaller deserialiser-multiplexer-switches each serving a sub-set of the input

ports and the associated input-side half-queues. This reduces memory write-access contention.

4. The read-side switch-demultiplexer-serialiser (TDM transmitter shift registers on the read-side memory bus) is sectorised into independent smaller serialiser-demultiplexer-switches each serving a subset of the output ports and associated output-side half-queues. This reduces memory read-access contention.

10

5. The half-queues within sectors may be managed naturally and memory-efficiently as grouped sub-queues sharing sectorised memory.

15 6. The sectorisation of memory interposes a switch-demultiplexer-serialiser on the input side of the transpose interconnect and a deserialiser-multiplexer-switch on the output side of the transpose interconnect. Logically these are transparent and a 1:1 connection between half-queues is preserved without contention. Memory read-access contention is introduced in each input sector and memory write-access contention is introduced in each output sector. However, there is no overall deterioration of bandwidth provided the sector memory is dual-ported.

25

7. The individual paths of the transpose interconnect that connect the same input-sector / output-sector pair are collected into bundles that form the inter-sector arms of a transpose bus interconnection between input and output sectors.

30

8. The utilisation of the bundles may be improved by reducing the number of physical links that make up the bundles whilst preserving the logical links between the associated half-queues, i.e. reducing the speed-up from $k=N$ to some more modest value, typically with k lying between 1 and 2. This does however introduce traffic-pattern dependence.

9. A reconfigurable interconnection permits a fixed pool of physical links to be partitioned between the arms of the bus transpose, i.e. the number of physical links that make up each bundle may be varied according to need. This permits the switch to adapt to different traffic patterns whilst making efficient use of its resources.

15

The resulting logical structure is shown in Figure 27. Referring to Figure 27, the switch 300 has two input sectors 301, 302 each with two input ports 301a, 301b; 302a, 302b. Likewise there are two output sectors 303, 304 each having two output ports 303c, 303d; 304c, 304d. Each input sector comprises a pair of four input demultiplexers 311 having outputs to queue storage 312; each output sector comprises a pair of four output multiplexers 313 having inputs from queue storage 314. A reconfigurable interconnect 315 connects input-side half-queues to output side half-queues. A snap shot is shown of active interconnect paths corresponding to a speed-up of $k=2$. Inactive paths are shown dotted. Each input sector 301, 302 has four output ports and each output sector has four input ports linked by the active paths and logically routed to corresponding half-queues. The interconnect configuration shown has one path between the upper input sector 301 and upper output sector 303; three paths between the upper

input sector 301 and lower output sector 304; three paths from the lower input sector 302 to upper output sector 303; and one path from the lower input sector 302 to the lower output sector 304.

5

Variants within this architectural family have various functions placed before or after the optical interconnect, provide different degrees of efficiency of use of the interconnect bandwidth and provide different detailed
10 partitions between optical and electronic technology. Variants also use differing organisations of queues and their control.

A state-of-the art router of known design is organised
15 as a set of line-cards interconnected by a high-speed crossbar switch controlled by a scheduler. The line-cards inter alia contain the input queues for the crossbar and also typically output queues (at least for packet reassembly).

20

This router structure is shown in Figure 28 (c.f. Figure 20, having a different perspective). In Figure 28, the line cards contain centralised shared memory switches 401-8 of the sectors. Demultiplexers 410-3 of the input
25 sectors and multiplexers 414-7 of the output sectors together with a central transpose interconnection 418 are viewed as forming the central crossbar switch.

To be exactly equivalent to an input-queued crossbar,
30 the links of the transpose operate at the line rate and the crossbar reconfigures each packet timeslot under control of a scheduler. The scheduler is required to solve a bipartite

matching problem and is responsible for a severe performance bottleneck where the line rate is high.

Recently, Birkhoff-von Neumann input-queued switches
5 have been introduced. In such devices the traffic matrix, specifying the desired traffic capacity that can be supported between each input-output port, is decomposed into a convex combination of permutations using an algorithm due to Birkhoff-von Neumann. The central crossbar
10 is then successively configured (every time slot) in accordance with each of the permutations with a probability equal to the coefficient of that permutation in the expansion using a packetised weighted fair queuing (WFQ) algorithm. When a particular routing is set up, traffic for
15 that routing is extracted from the input queue and transmitted via the crossbar. Note however, that as the routings are set up using statistical predictions, there will not necessarily be any traffic for the present routing. 100% throughput can be achieved with no-output
20 queuing. However a number of permutations up to the order of the square of the number of ports must be pre-calculated, the WFQ calculations must still be performed on-line, and the internal links of the crossbar must operate at the line rate.

25

In an embodiment of the present invention, speed-up of the crossbar is exploited to simplify the switch at the expense of requiring input and output queuing as in Figure 28. Speed-up permits the construction of a service matrix
30 that consists of a sum of permutation matrices that in essence form a rational approximation to the desired traffic matrix. This may be constructed so that each element of the service matrix exceeds the corresponding

matrix element of the traffic matrix, thereby guaranteeing 100% throughput at that rate.

Referring to Figure 29, a switch 430 is shown having
5 spatial speed-up, with speed-up $k=8$. The switch 430 has
four inputs 431-4 and four outputs 450-3. The four inputs
431-4 are each fed to a respective eight-output distributor
436-9, and the distributor outputs are fed via a first
optical interconnect 435 formed from fibres to eight four-
10 input/four output optical crossbars 440-7. The four outputs
450-3 are provided by the outputs of four eight-input
multiplexers 454-7. The inputs of the multiplexers 454-7
are fed from the crossbars 440-7 via a second optical
interconnect 458. The first optical interconnect 435 links
15 respective outputs of each demultiplexer to an input of
each crossbar, and the second optical interconnect 458
links outputs of each crossbar to each multiplexer. Hence
each crossbar receives inputs from each demultiplexer and
provides an output to each multiplexer. The crossbars are
20 consecutively and cyclically configured to form eight
connection permutations.

The device is Clos-like, and may be considered as a
switch that accepts a TDM frame with 8 slots and re-
25 arranges spatially the contents of each time-slot in
accordance with the state of each crossbar 440-7.

At the cost of introducing a fixed latency the cyclic
switches may be phased, for example by latching the packet
30 data at their optical transmitters, so that packets are
received at the output a frame-time after the packets are
transmitted to the input. The internal line rate may then
be reduced compared to the line rate external to the

interconnect (i.e. outside the dashed box shown in Figure 29) by the number of time slots within the frame. In general for a switch with p crossbars, the reduction will be less compared to the line rate external to the overall packet switch because of the speed-up requirement but it can still be of the order of $p/2$.

In a preferred embodiment, the crossbars in Figure 29 are transparent optical cross-connects defining the pre-calculated permutations. Advantageously, the demultiplexers have electrical outputs to VCSELs, and the interconnects use plastic fibres. This is advantageous because the technology and the know-how already exists. Also optoelectronic interfaces are then no more complex than the serialiser-deserialiser (SERDES) / parallel VCSEL links that interface the line cards with the core crossbar switch at speeds up to 30 Gbit/s in conventional designs. It should be borne in mind that switches do not exist in isolation, and that the data input to a switch is likely to have been the subject of multiplexing at an earlier stage. Hence, there may be an "unseen" multiplexer at each input from this earlier stage, and this would with the distributor 436 etc form an identity, so that inputs could in fact be provided direct from their signal sources rather than via mux-transfer-demux stages.

However, by means of the embodiment, the very high-speed power hungry core switch of the prior art is replaced by almost passive optical cross-connects 440-7. Furthermore for a traffic pattern which varies statistically, a scheduling algorithm may be used which operates on the timescale of the traffic variation.

It will of course be clear that optical switching is not critical to the invention. Electrical paths could be used instead.

5

In the embodiment of Figure 29, packet delays are worse than those of the theoretical optimal maximum weight matching scheduler; however the optimal maximum weight matching scheduler is impractical to implement in any case.

10 The packet delay encountered will be no worse than a Birkhoff-von Neumann switch after the fixed latency due to packet phasing is subtracted.

Note that Figure 26 is equivalent to Figure 28 with
15 the central interconnect (dashed box) replaced by Figure 29 with the addition of input port multiplexers and output port demultiplexers that provide n lower rate ports at a rate of $1/n$ of the 'line rate' for the architecture shown in Figure 28. The speed-up is given by $k=m/n$.

20

An embodiment of a control system in accordance with an embodiment of the invention is now described:

1. A desired traffic matrix is specified;
25 alternatively it may be estimated from queue state information.

2. A service matrix with integer entries in units of the internal link rate and that has row and column sums
30 equal to m , where m is the number of ports from each input sector and the ports of each output sector, is constructed such that each integer entry exceeds the corresponding entry in the traffic matrix. The matrix is calculated by

calculating the nearest integer greater than each entry of the traffic matrix represented in units of the internal line rate and then incrementing the entries with the least excess service rate until the matrix satisfies the row and column sums requirement.

3. The service matrix is then decomposed into its constituent permutations. This is equivalent to a bipartite graph edge colouring problem. The solution is simple to implement when m is a power of two.

In a second embodiment of the control method, control is achieved by an online algorithm in which each crossbar monitors the difference between the target service matrix and the current service matrix less its own current state. Using this information as the weight, the crossbar sets its future state in accordance with the matching found to a maximum weight bipartite matching problem.

It is clear that an all-ones matrix is always present and therefore in a preferred embodiment is implemented using a fixed transposition. The $m-1$ is then advantageously a power of two in the decomposition.

In a further embodiment, the number of crossbars is increased beyond the minimum number required allowing individual crossbars to be taken off-line while their state is updated. This is done in demand to changes in traffic patterns. Alternatively or additionally, this may be done at some multiple of the frame time. Because updating is off-line, traffic is unaffected by the time taken to update. As known to those skilled in the art, the slow speed of reconfiguration of optical devices has previously

been a difficulty: however because the slow speed of reconfiguration does not affect operation, optical technology may be used in this embodiment.

5 In another optical embodiment, the reconfigurable interconnect is constructed as m optical cross-connects forming rows sandwiched between line cards (sectors) forming columns.

10 Load balanced packet switches

It will be recalled that balanced traffic is the case where each arriving packet has destination port addresses uniformly distributed over the outputs. A load balanced
15 switch is a device which incorporates means for transforming unbalanced traffic into balanced traffic. Typically it comprises two devices sandwiching a switching stage.

20 Attention is now directed to Figure 30, which shows a switch 500 comprising a sectorised centralised shared memory switch 501 preceded by a first crossbar 502 and succeeded by a second crossbar 503. The centralised shared memory switch has four sectors. The first crossbar performs
25 a per-time slot cyclic shift to evenly distribute the traffic across the centralised shared memory switching elements, and thus generates balanced traffic. The second crossbar routes the traffic from the shared memory 501.

30 For balanced traffic, the Birkhoff-von Neumann decomposition simplifies to a cyclic shift. By using the interconnect from Figure 29, the spatial interconnect needed to provide the cyclic shift reduces to a fixed

transposition. The load balanced Birkhoff-von Neumann switch that results is shown in Figure 31. Figure 31 can be derived from Figure 30 by expanding the crossbar switches as route and select switches. The internal lines that form the transpose interconnections within these route and select switches would normally have to run at the line rate. Load balancing allows the internal line rate to be slower (by a factor of k/N - k is speed-up, N is overall number of input/output ports) than the external line rate, as in Figure 29.

The architecture of Figure 30 has been described as a two-stage switch. However, Figure 31 demonstrates that this is a matter of interpretation. It is only necessary to redraw the boundaries from Figure 31 to achieve the parallel packet switch of Figure 32. In Figure 32, the switch device 600 has four multi-port packet switches 601-4 each fed by a four port input switch stage 605 and each feeding a four port output switch stage 606. The multi-port packet switches run slower than the external line-rate. The function of the first stage 605 is to balance the traffic over the packet switches and the function of the output stage 606 is to recombine the outputs of the packet switches.

25

There are however complications in ensuring that the resultant switch preserves cell sequence and is work conserving (i.e. that an output never idles when there is a packet destined to it within the switch).

30

The method of control of the Clos-like packet switch described in this invention favours the use of transparent optical technology as the centre stage crossbars are only

required to switch at the rate required to adapt to non-stationary traffic and not on a per-packet basis. However, the central stage crossbars could be implemented as electronic TDM memory switches, at the cost of additional optical-to-electronic and electronic-to-optical conversions if the transpose interconnections are optical. As mentioned previously, a centralised shared memory switch is in essence a TDM memory switch with slightly modified control to permit packets to be retained for longer than one TDM frame, in queues within memory. It is therefore possible to use exactly the same centralised shared memory packet switch modules to implement all three stages of the Clos-like packet switch. Depending on the method of control the buffers in each stage may or may not have significant occupancies.

This fully buffered architecture can emulate a wide range of architectures that have previously been considered distinct:

20

1. The generalised knockout switch results if the first two stages are configured as TDM switches i.e. packets are only queued (beyond a single TDM frame) in the final stage. The first two stages attempt to route packets to the correct output port i.e. normally the last stage acts as a 1:1 connection. Otherwise the packet is routed to the correct sector and is then switched to the correct output port queue. If that is not possible the packet is dropped (knock-out principle). This architecture favours technology that possesses very fast switching in the first two stages and fast reconfiguration in the last stage.

2. The invention here results if the central stage is configured as a TDM switch with queuing in both the first and third stages. The TDM switches are set to provision bandwidth between first stage and final stage sectors according to demand. This is only required on a timescale that characterises the statistical variation of the traffic. This favours technology with fast switching in the first and last stages and much slower reconfiguration in the central stage.

10

3. The Parallel Packet Switch and Load Balanced Birkhoff-von Neumann switches result if the first and final stages are configured as TDM switches and queuing only takes place in the central stage. The central stages may run slower than the external line rate but intelligent load balancing requires a sophisticated scheduler. This favours technology that possesses very fast switching in the first and last stages and fast switching in the central stage.

20

4. An input-queued router-select crossbar switch results if the central and final stages are configured as TDM switches and queuing takes place in the first stage. This favours technology that possesses fast switching in all stages but not as fast as required by an output-queued crossbar.

25

5. A Clos-like network of packet switches results if queuing is performed in all three-stages. Load balancing is then a matter of software determining local routing tables. These need only be updated on timescales that characterise non-stationarity of the traffic. The use of speed-up permits coarser quantisation of the traffic matrix, reducing the complexity of the implicit scheduler. The

30

preservation of the logical structure of the cross-point queues distributed through the three stages ensures that cells are not mis-sequenced. The spatial speed-up permits the central links to run slower than the line rate.

5

Although in the above description optical interconnects are provided by fibres, the invention extends to other methods of interconnection, and specifically includes the use optical components such as lenses and
10 holographic gratings together, or on their own to provide free-space paths.

Embodiments of the present invention have now been described with particular reference to the examples
15 illustrated. However, it will be appreciated that variations and modifications may be made to the examples described within the scope of the present invention.

CLAIMS

1. A line card interface device, in use interfacing
between plural line cards of a digital data transmission
5 network carrying non-balanced packet traffic at a given
line rate, said traffic having a statistical distribution
which varies at a given variation rate, the interface
device comprising an optical selector and a control device,
the optical selector having plural interface inputs for
10 connection to a first multi-path optical connection, plural
interface outputs for connection to a second multi- path
optical connection, and plural optical paths connecting the
interface inputs to the interface outputs, wherein the
optical paths allow transfer of more packets per unit time
15 than are incident per unit time at the plural interface
inputs, thereby providing speed-up, the optical selector
further having a respective optical switch per path, each
optical switch having a control input and responsive to
control signals at the control input, the speed of response
20 being substantially less than said line rate, each said
optical switch having a first state in which it enables its
path and a second state in which it disables its path, and
the control device having means for applying control
signals to the switch control inputs at a rate
25 corresponding to the rate of statistical variation in
traffic distribution.

2. A line card interface device according to Claim 1
wherein the optical paths are spatially distinct and are
30 greater in number than the number of the plural interface
inputs to provide spatial speed-up.

3. A line card interface device according to Claim 1 or
2, wherein the interface inputs and outputs are divided
into input groups and output groups, each input group
5 having a distributor, said distributor having one or more
of said interface inputs and plural outputs, each output
group having a multiplexer having an input, one or more
interface outputs, and the optical paths comprise an
optical connection wherein each input group is connectable
10 to each output group.

4. A line card interface according to Claim 3 wherein the
distributor and the multiplexer are electronic.

15 5. A line card interface according to Claim 3 wherein the
distributor and the multiplexer are optical.

6. A line card interface device according to Claim 3, 4
or 5 wherein each input group has a respective input group
20 memory, said distributor having plural outputs for writing
to said input group memory and each output group has a
respective output group memory, said multiplexer input
being connected to receive outputs from said output group
memory.

25

7. A line card interface device according to any of
Claims 3 -6, wherein the optical connection comprises an
optical fibre device.

30 8. A line card interface device according to any of
Claims 3 - 7, wherein the optical connection comprises
optical components providing free-space paths in use.

9. A line card interface device according to any of Claims 3-8, wherein each input group has the same number of inputs as the number of outputs of said output groups.

5

10. A line card interface according to any of Claims 3-9, wherein each memory is a dual-port memory having an input port for writing to the memory and an output port for reading from the memory.

10

11. A line card interface according to any of Claims 3-10, having latching circuitry for storing packet data for input to said interface inputs whereby said multi-path optical connections have a line rate reduced compared to said line rate.

15

12. A method of interfacing between the optical inputs and optical outputs of plural line cards of a digital data transmission network carrying non-balanced packet traffic at a given line rate, said traffic having a statistical variation, the method comprising:-

20

selecting between plural optical paths to provide a set of links between said optical inputs and optical outputs, the plural optical paths extending between the plural outputs of each line card and the plural optical inputs of each other line card, wherein said paths allow transfer of more packets per unit time than are incident per unit time at the plural interface inputs, thereby providing speed-up;

25

30 varying said selection at a rate corresponding to the rate of statistical variation in traffic distribution.

13. A method according to Claim 12 wherein the interface inputs and outputs are divided into input groups and output groups, each input group having a distributor, one or more interface inputs and a plurality of outputs, each output
5 group having a multiplexer, one or more interface outputs and said plurality of inputs, and the optical paths comprise an optical transpose connection wherein each input group is connectable to each output group.

10 14. A method according to Claim 12 or 13, wherein said step of varying comprises:

providing a desired traffic matrix;

constructing a service matrix with integer entries in units of the internal link rate and that has row and column
15 sums equal to the said plurality is constructed such that in these units each of its entries exceeds the corresponding entry in the desired traffic matrix;

decomposing the service matrix into its constituent permutations and controlling said links using said
20 permutations.

15. A method according to Claim 14, wherein said constructing step comprises calculating the nearest integer greater than each entry of the traffic matrix represented
25 in units of the line rate and then incrementing the entries with the least excess service rate until the matrix satisfies the row and column sums requirement.

16. A method according to any of Claims 12-15, wherein
30 said plurality is a power of two.

17. A method according to any of Claims 12-16, comprising estimating said traffic matrix from information derived from queues at said line card inputs or outputs.

5 18. A method according to any of Claims 12-17, comprising storing packet data for input to said interface inputs whereby said multi-path optical connections have a line rate reduced compared to said line rate.

10 19. A routing device for unbalanced packet traffic, the device having a first plurality of input ports and a first plurality of output ports, the unbalanced packet traffic being incident at said input ports, the device comprising a first-third stages in series, the first and third stages
15 each having said plurality of deserialisers, said plurality of multiplexers, and a fixed transpose connection, each deserialiser having at least one input and said plurality of outputs, said at least one input forming a respective one of said input ports, each multiplexer having said
20 plurality of inputs and at least one output, said at least one output forming a respective one of said output ports, and each fixed transpose connection connecting respective outputs of each deserialiser to a respective input of each multiplexer, and the second stage having said plurality of
25 sets of packet data queues, each set of packet data queues comprising said plurality of queues, each set being disposed to receive data from a respective multiplexer of the first stage and to furnish data to a respective deserialiser of the third stage.

30

20. A routing device according to Claim 19, having latching circuitry for storing packet data prior to application to said multi-path optical connections whereby

said multi-path optical connections have a line rate reduced compared to said line rate.

21. A routing device according to Claim 19 or 20 in which
5 said optical connections are via fibres.

22. A routing device according to Claim 19 or 20 in which
said optical connections are via free-space connections.

10 23. A method of routing packet traffic using a device
having a number of input ports and said number of output
ports, the method comprising:

applying the packet traffic at said input ports;
deserialising signals at each input port to provide
15 first intermediate signals, said first intermediate signals
being disposed in a group of said number of signals
associated with each input port, whereby said number of
groups is formed;

transposing said first intermediate signals among said
20 groups to provide transposed groups containing one first
intermediate signal from each said group and multiplexing
together the transposed groups of first intermediate
signals, to provide said number of second intermediate
signals;

25 distributing said second intermediate signals among
said number of queue storage locations according to the
output port of the second intermediate signal;

selecting data from said storage locations and
serially outputting data from locations for sequential
30 output ports;

deserialising said serially output data to provide
third intermediate signals, said third intermediate signals

being disposed in a group of said number of signals,
whereby said number of groups is formed;

transposing said third intermediate signals among said
groups to provide transposed groups containing one third
5 intermediate signal from each said group and multiplexing
together the transposed groups of third intermediate
signals, to provide said number of output signals at said
output ports.

- 10 24. A method according to Claim 23, comprising latching
packet data prior to said transposing step interface inputs
whereby optical connections in said transposing steps have
a line rate reduced compared to an external line rate.

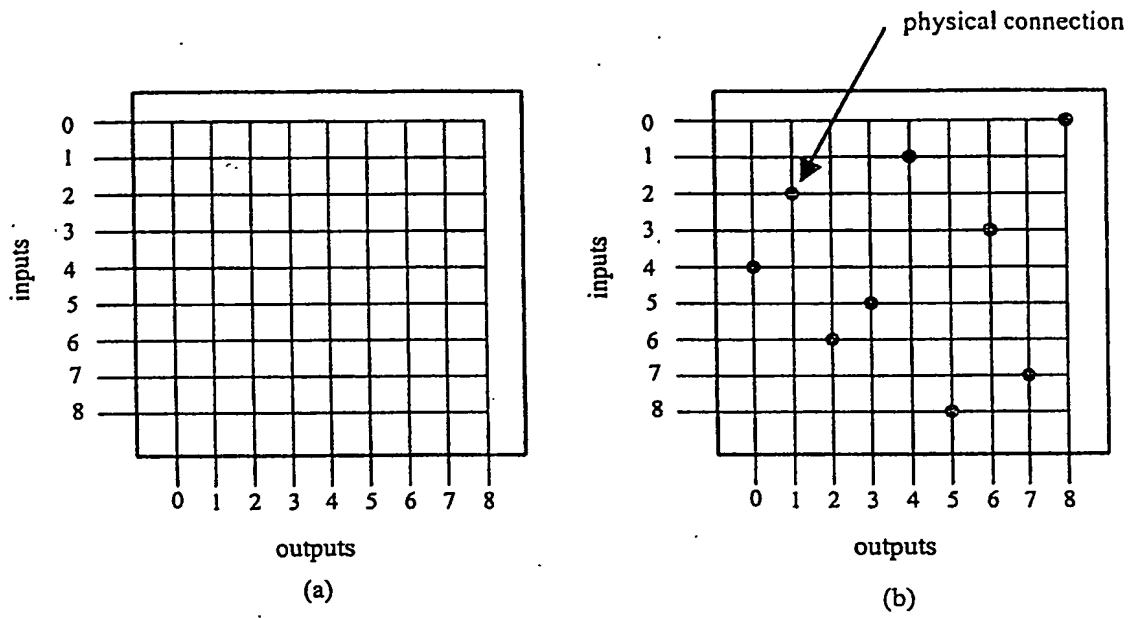


Figure 1

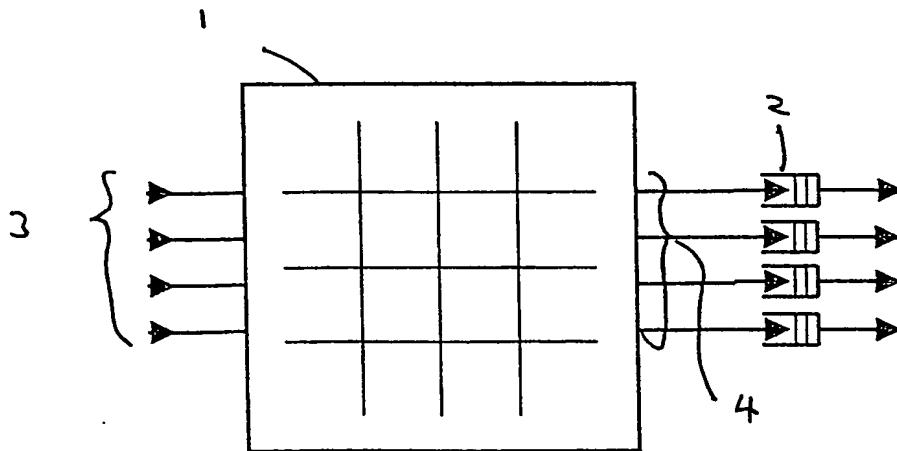


Figure 2

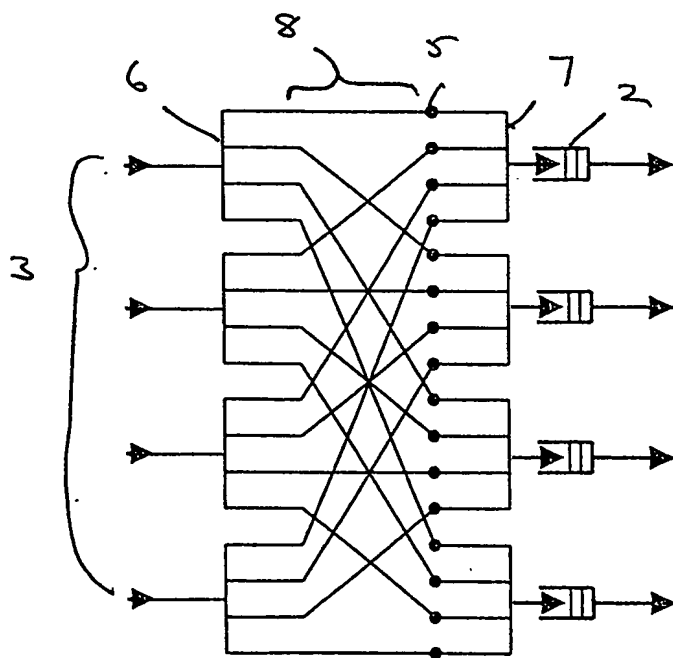


Figure 3

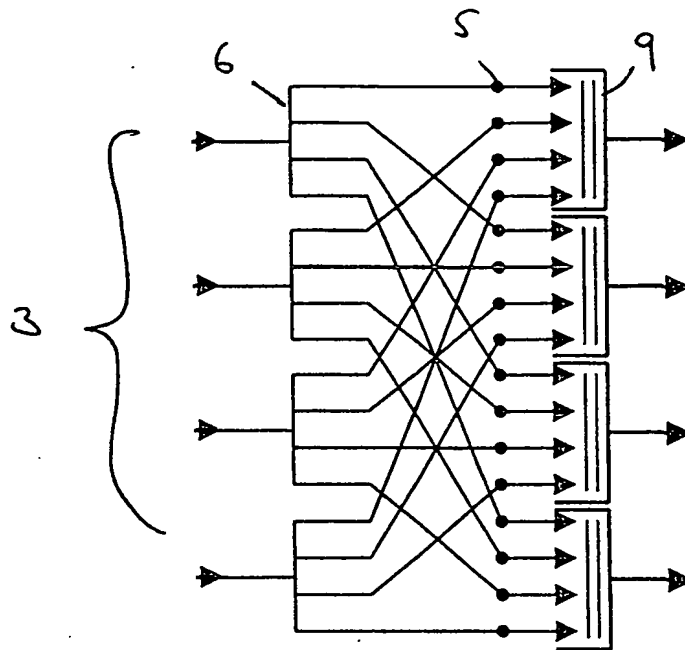


Figure 4

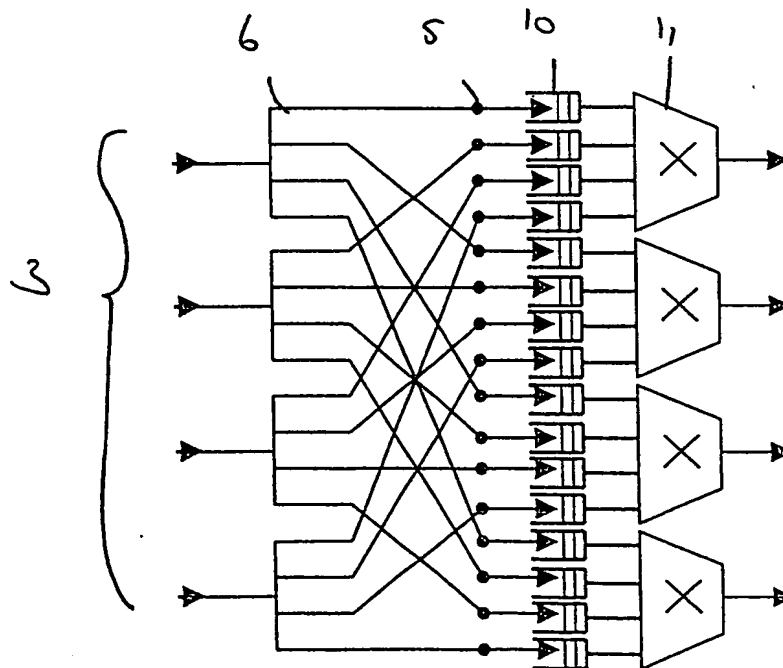


Figure 5

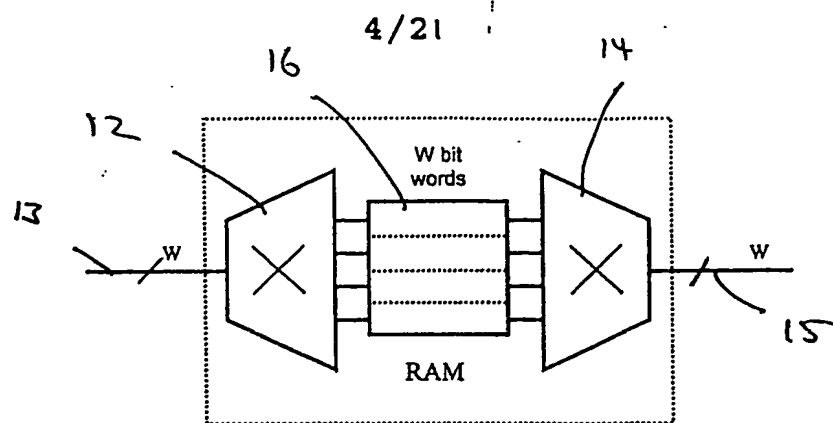


Figure 6

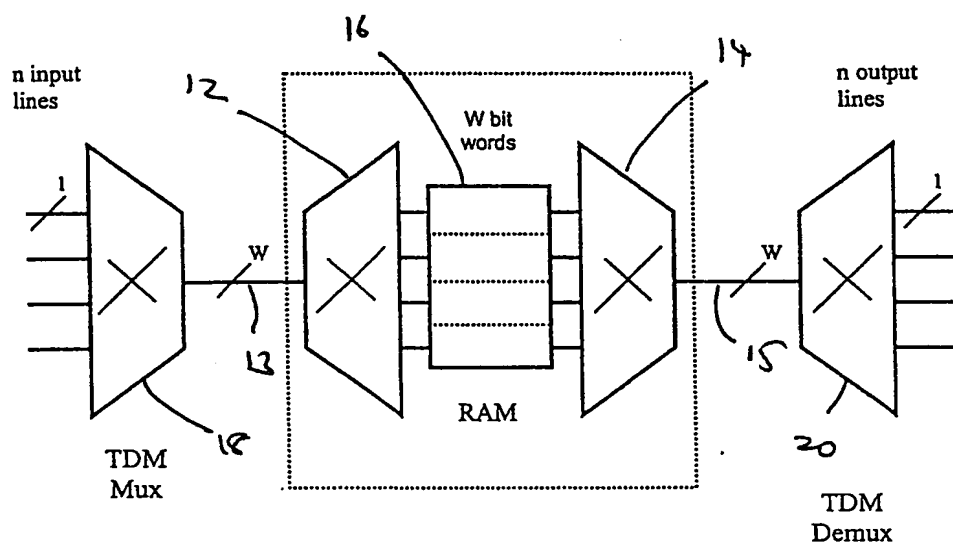


Figure 7

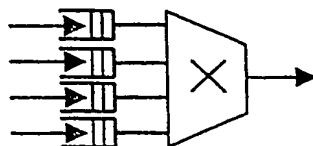
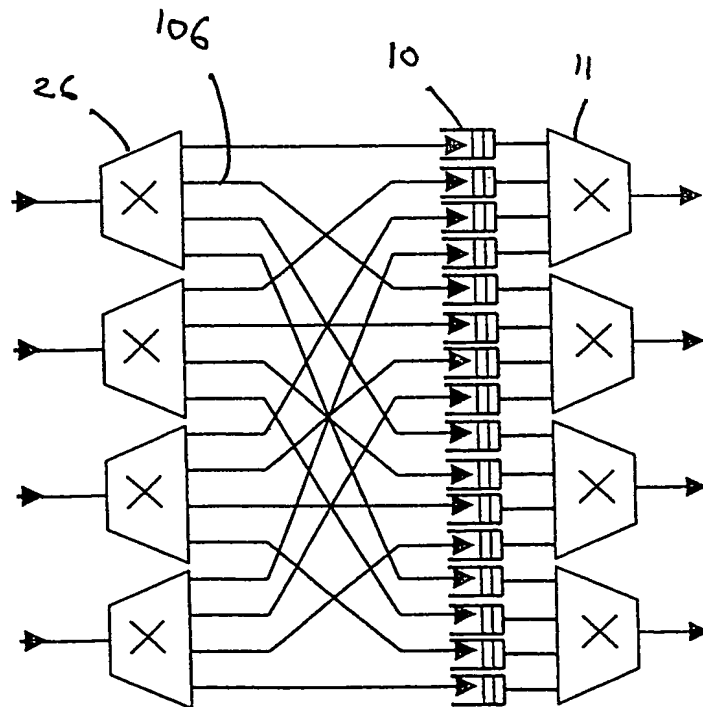
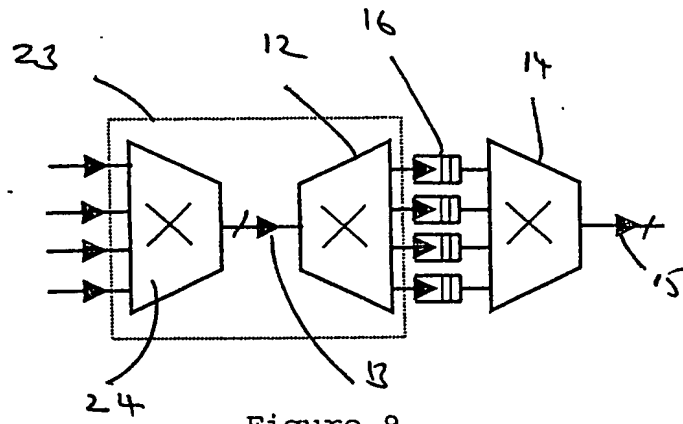


Figure 8

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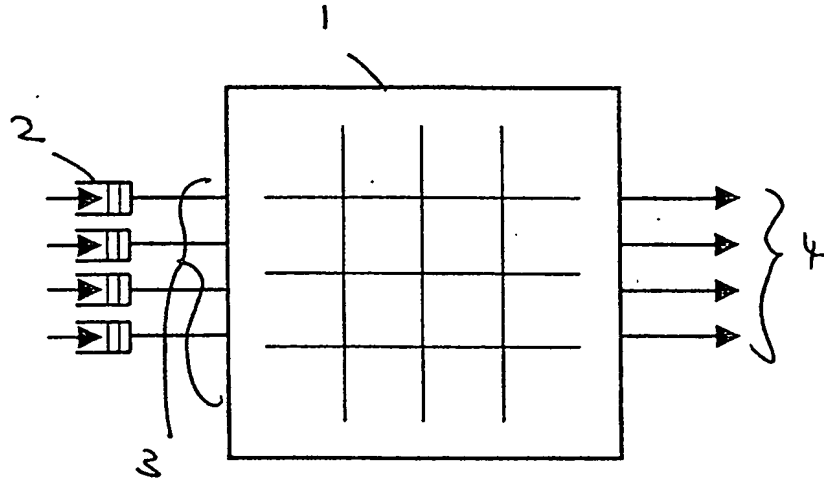


Figure 11

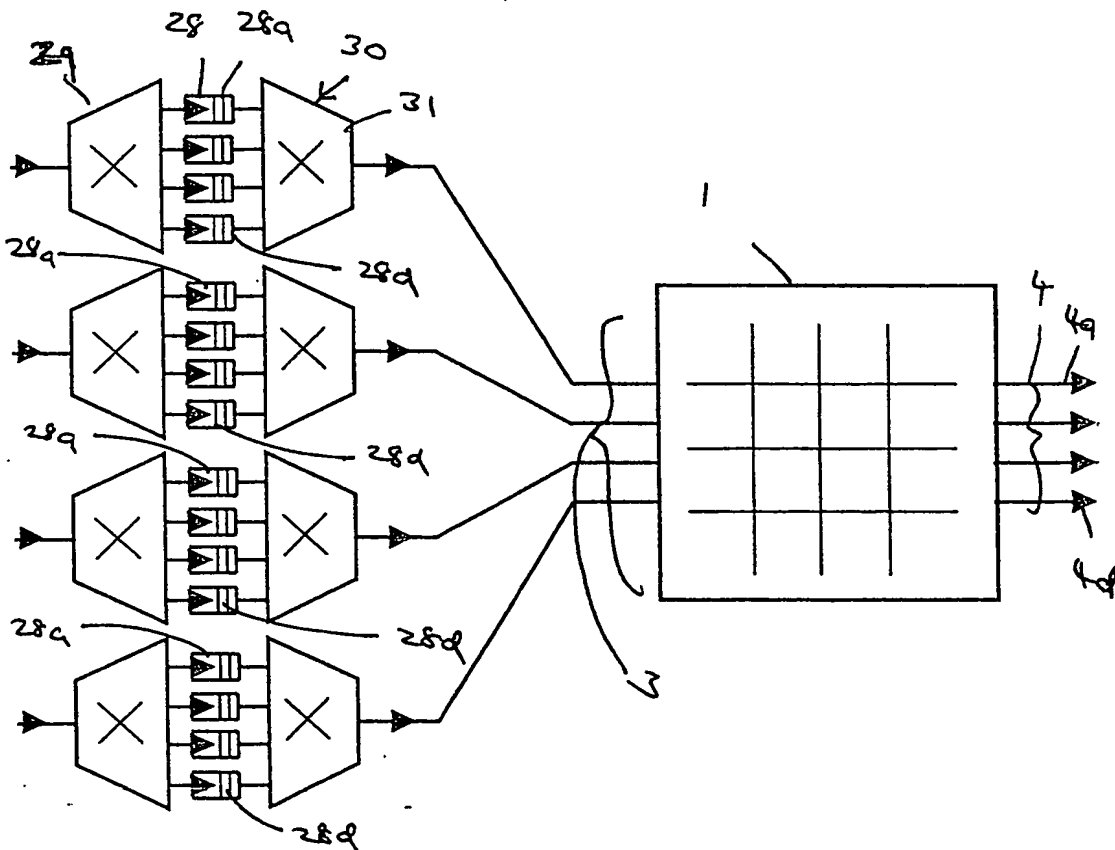


Figure 12

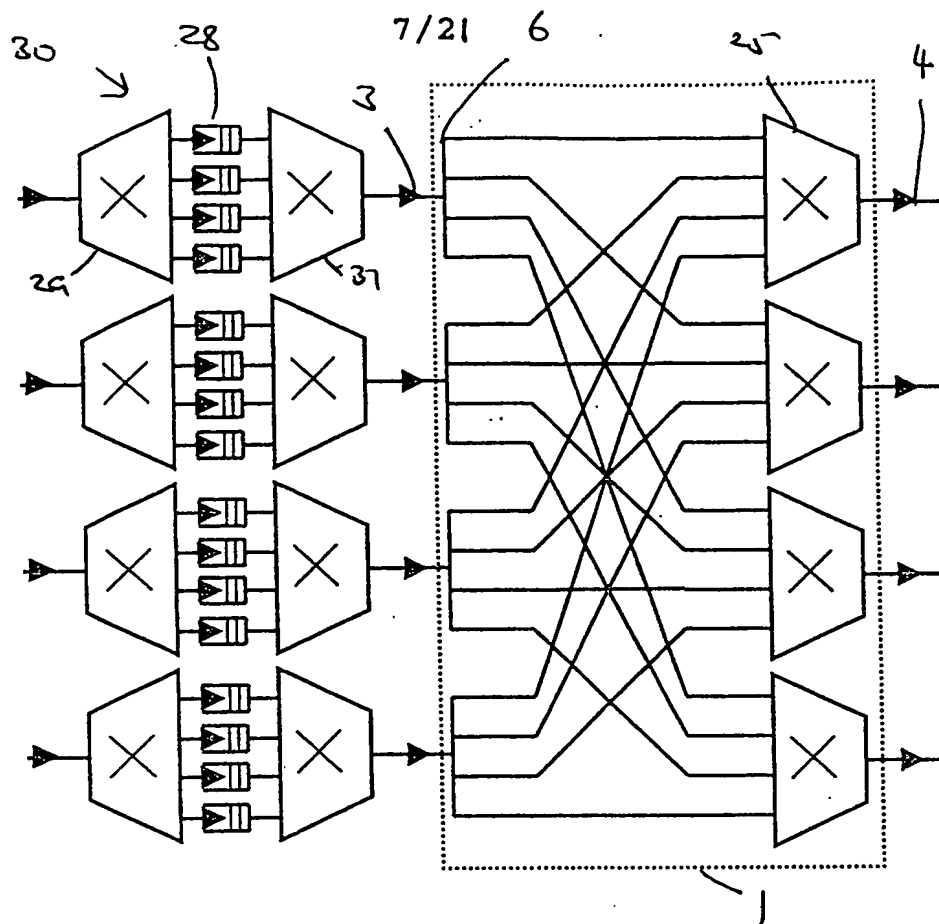


Figure 13

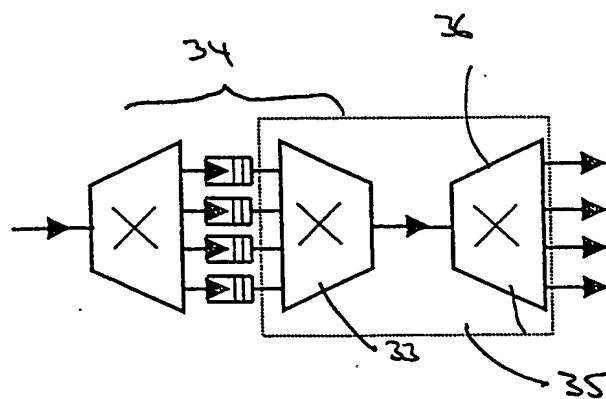


Figure 15

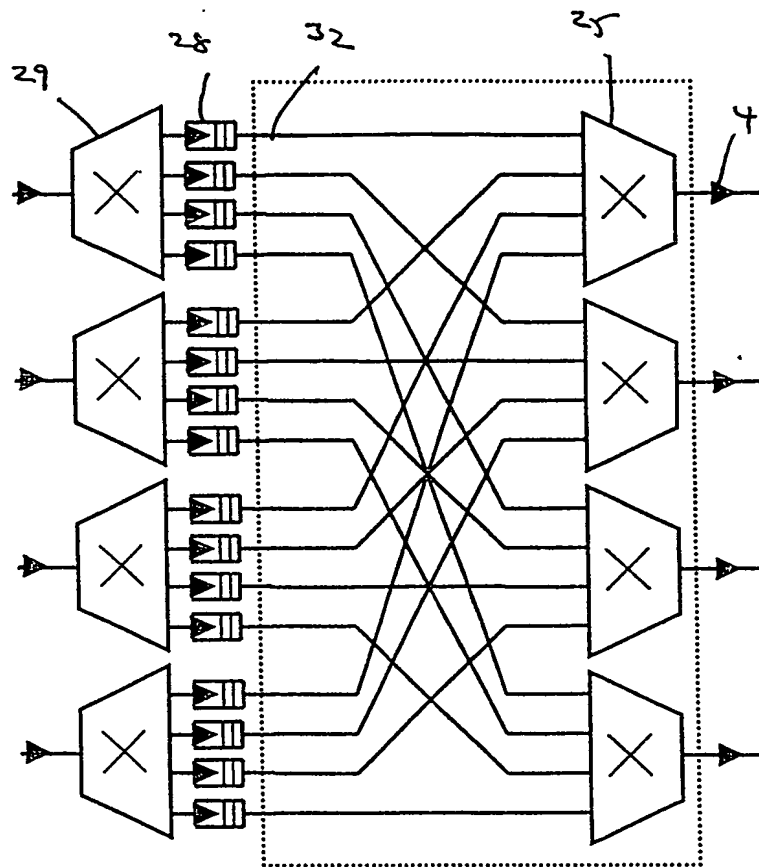


Figure 14

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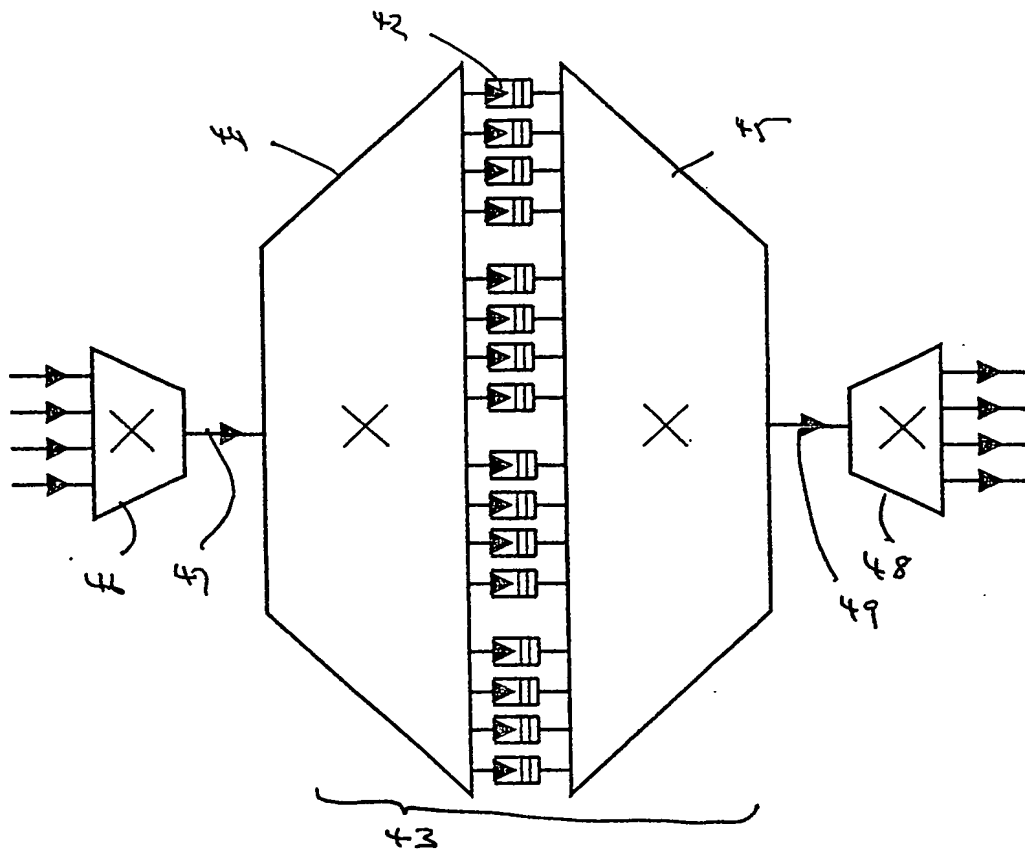


Figure 16

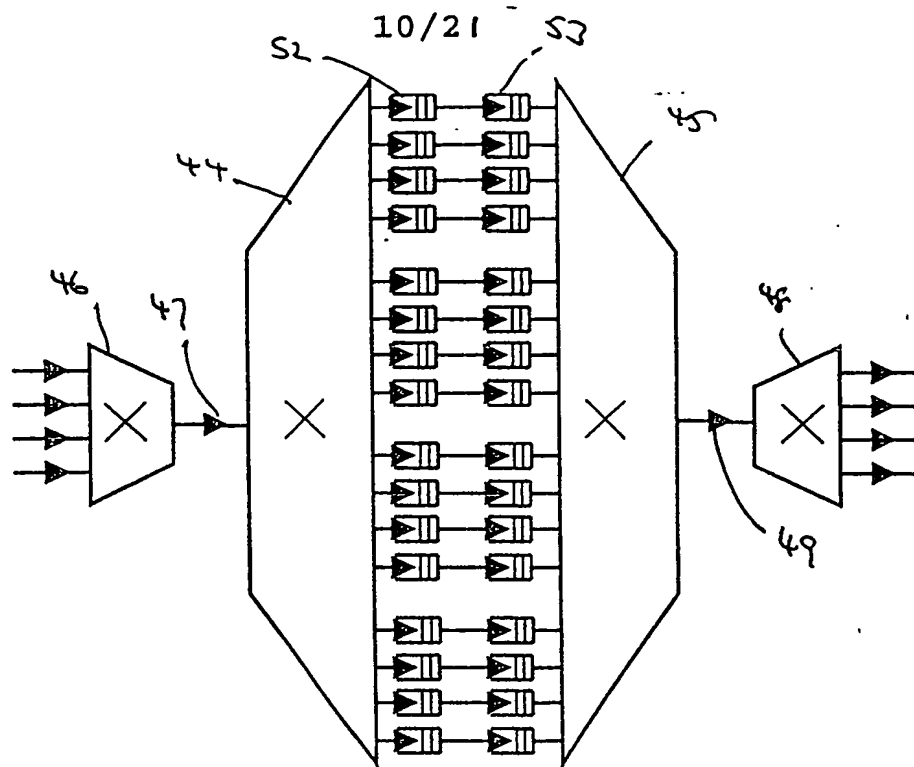


Figure 17

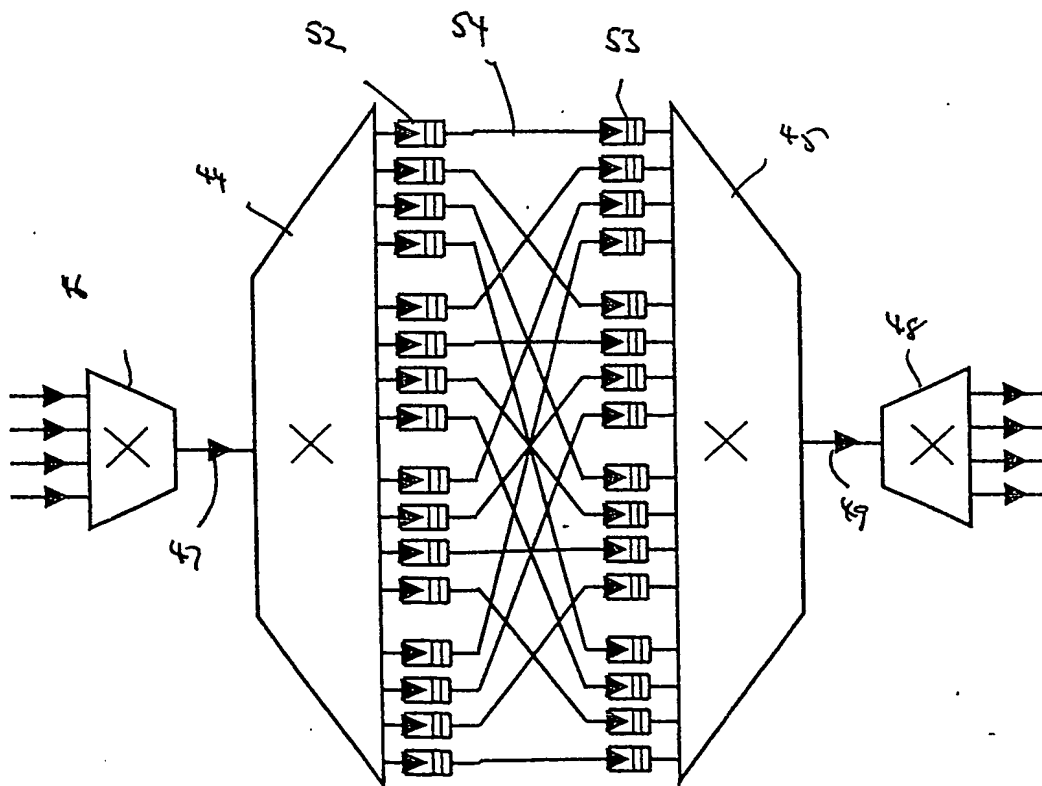


Figure 18

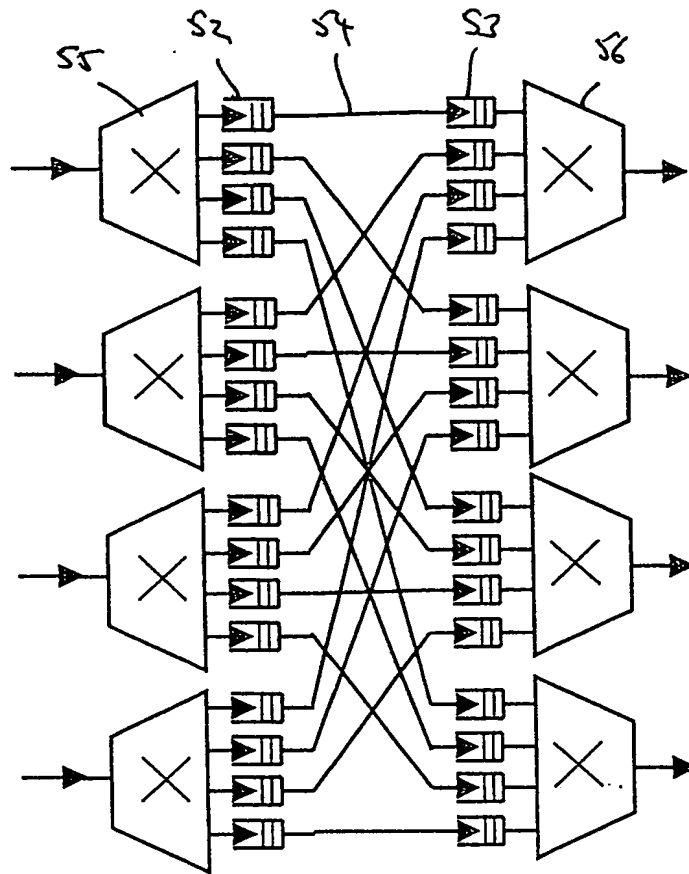


Figure 19

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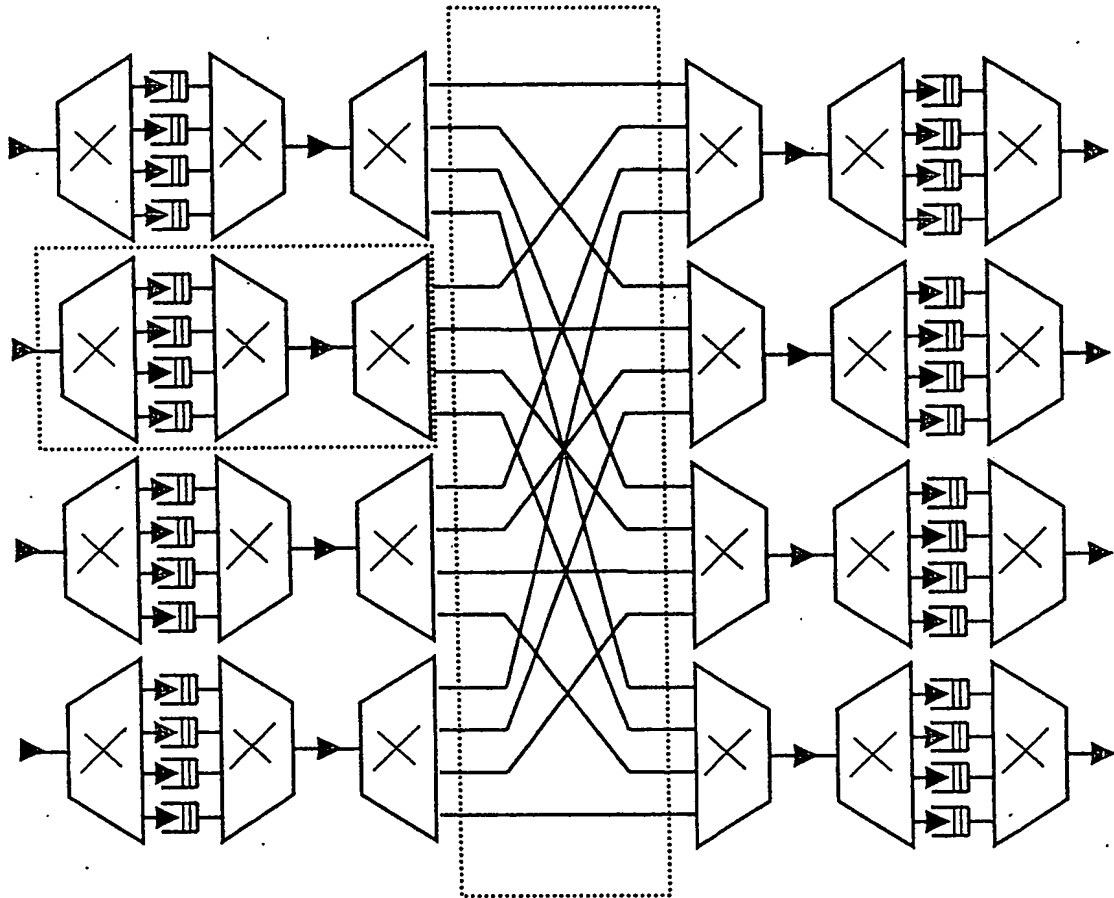


Figure 20

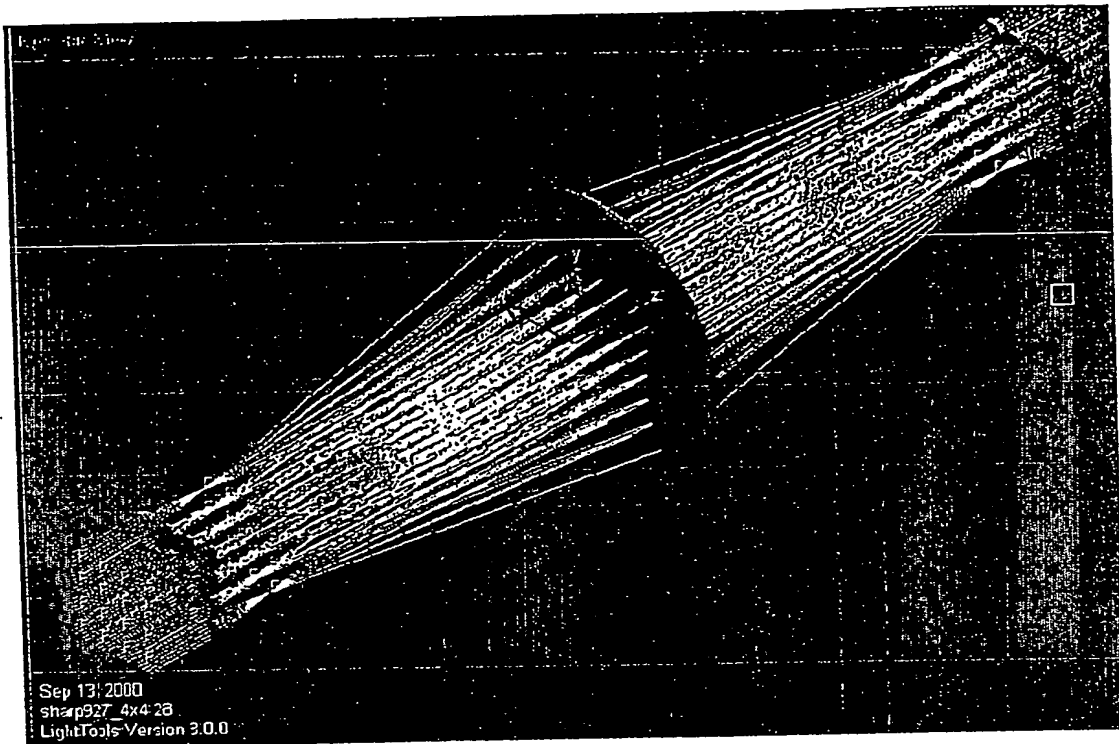


Figure 21

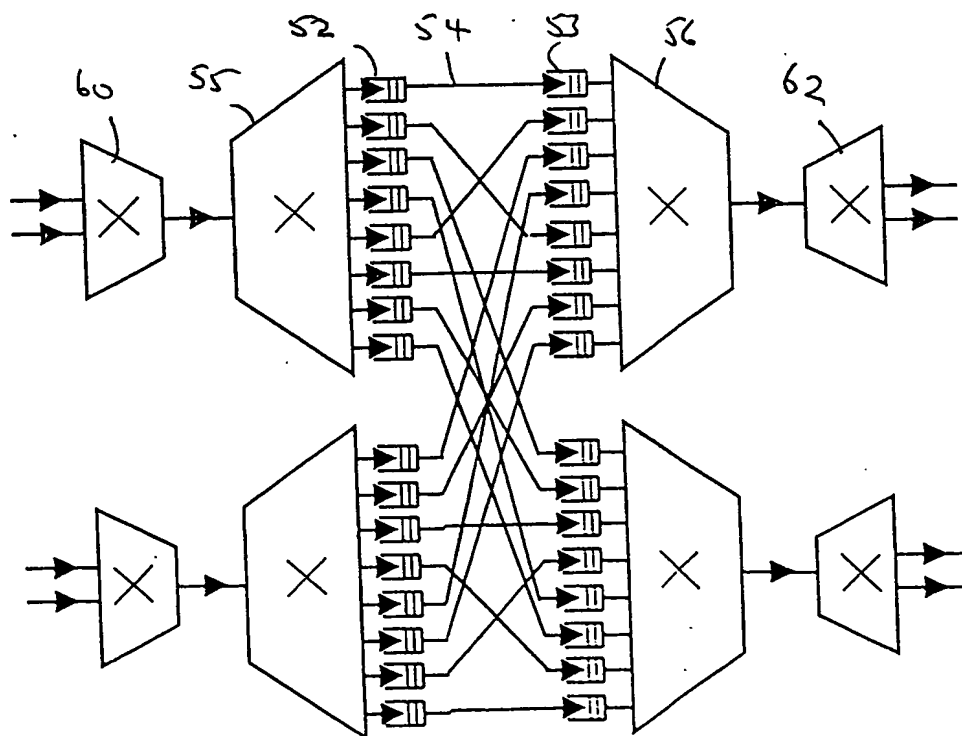


Figure 22

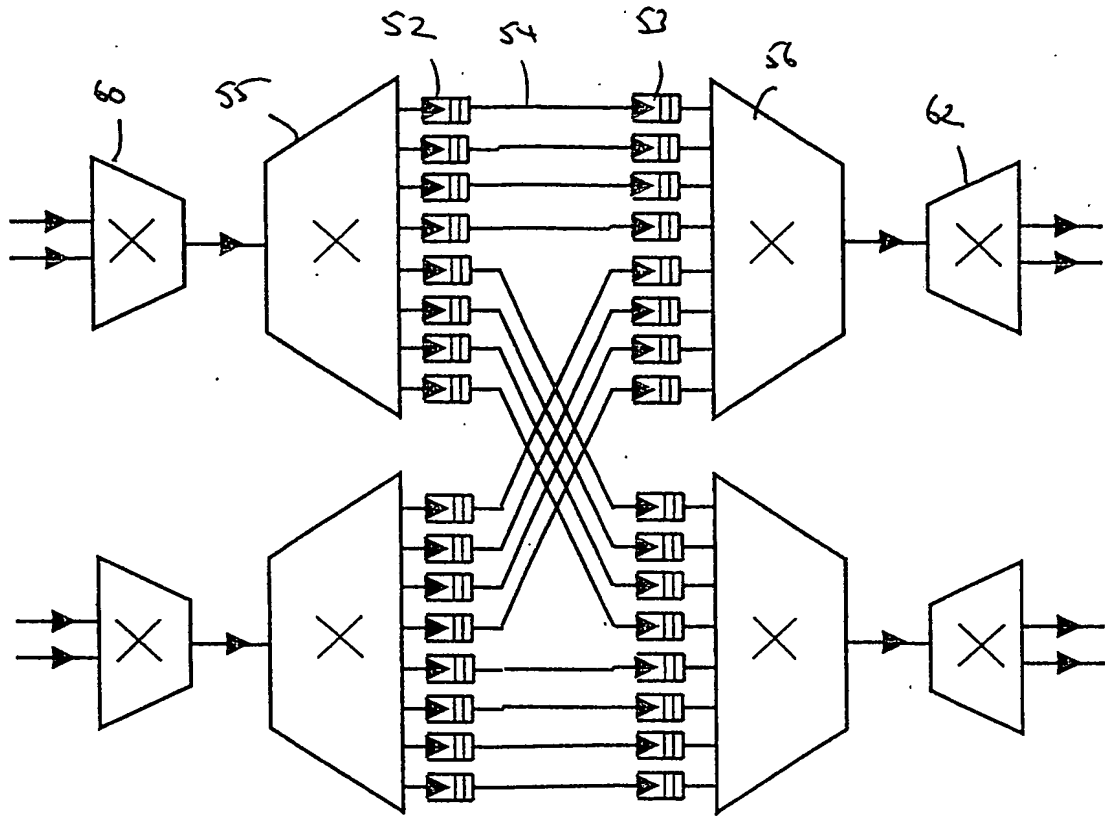


Figure 23

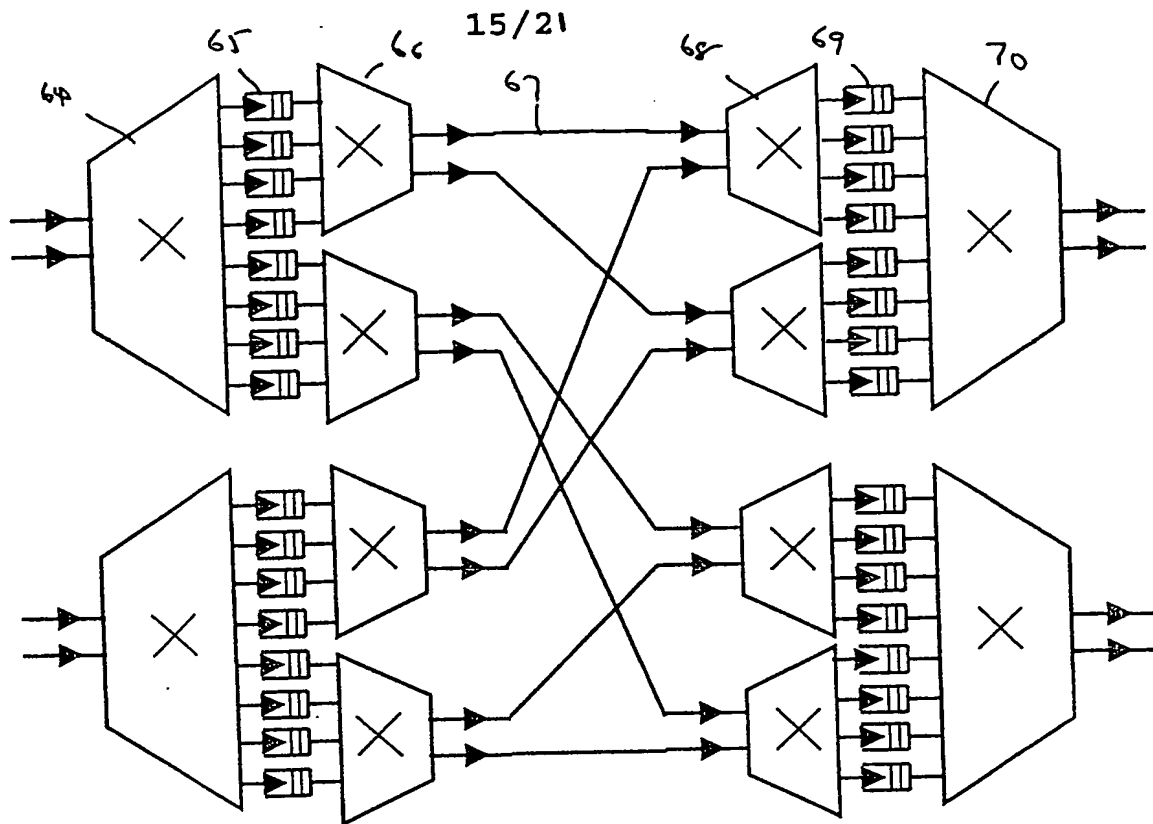


Figure 24

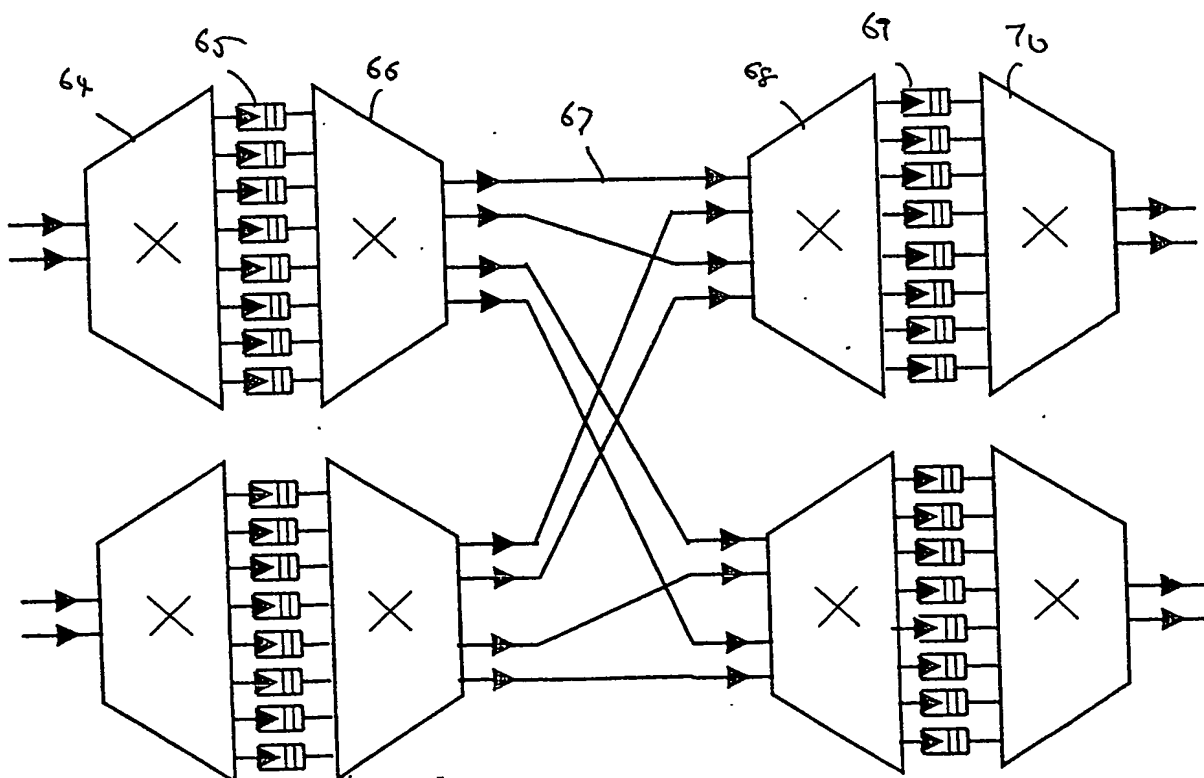


Figure 25

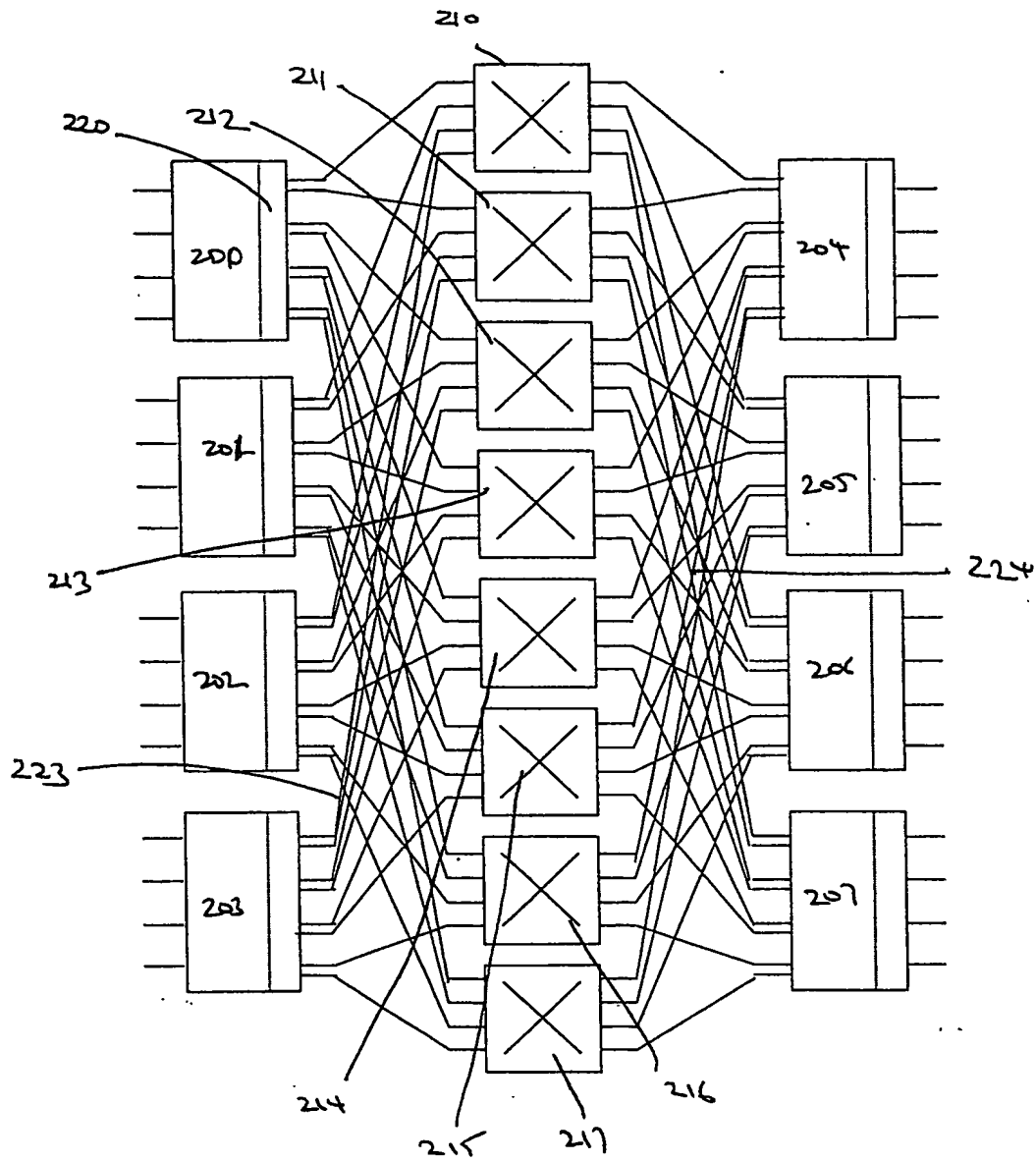


Figure 26

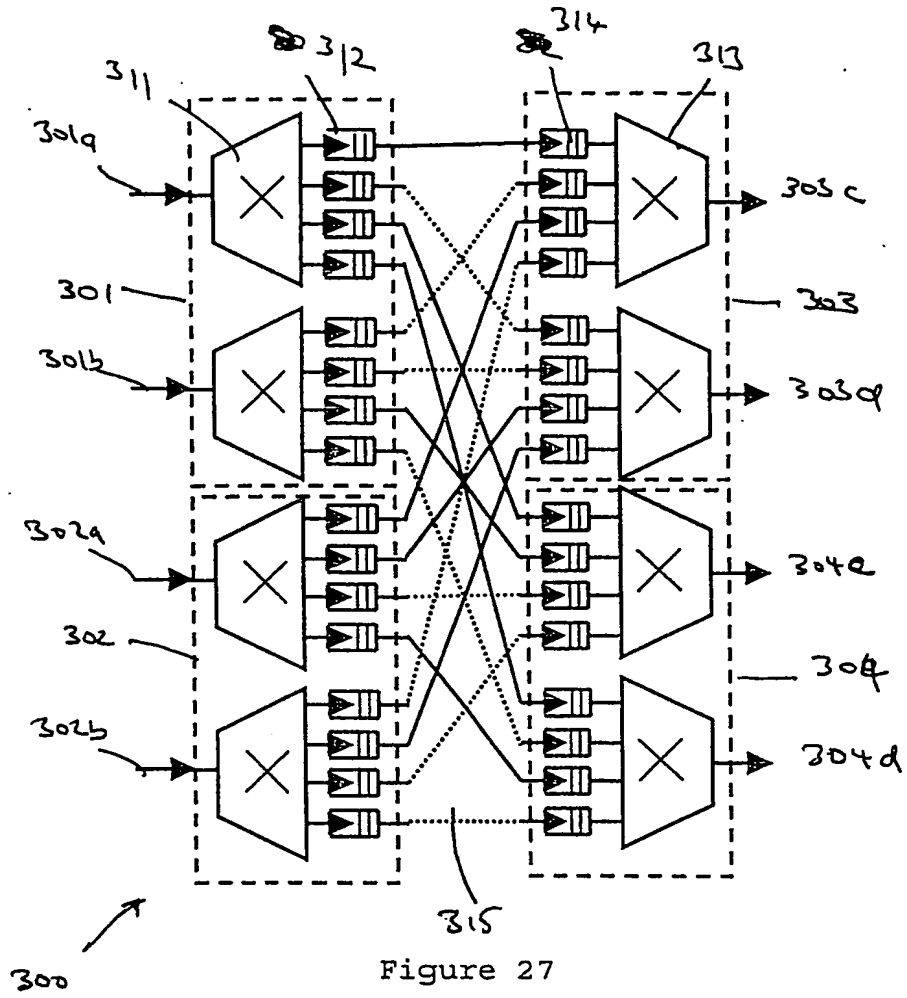


Figure 27

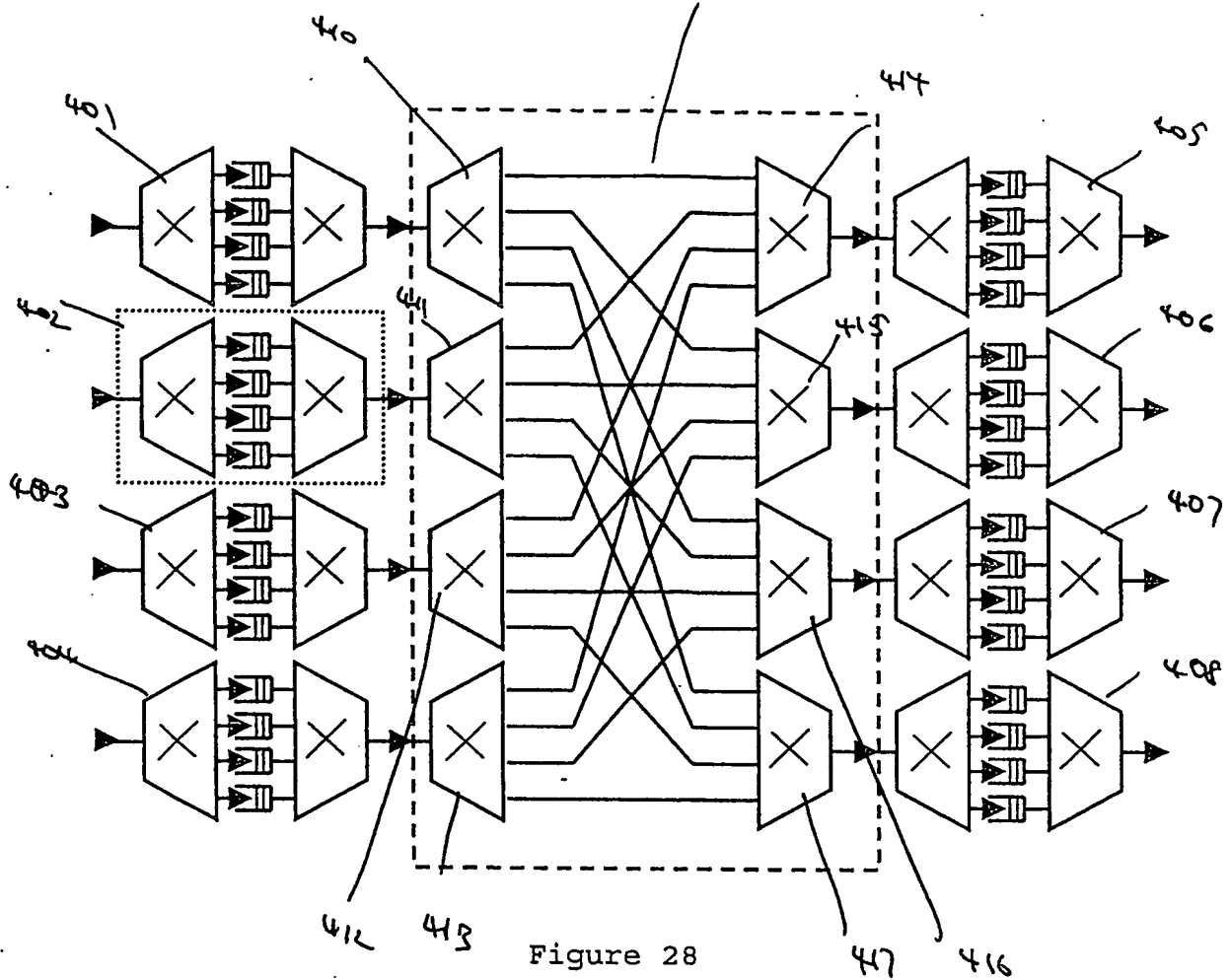
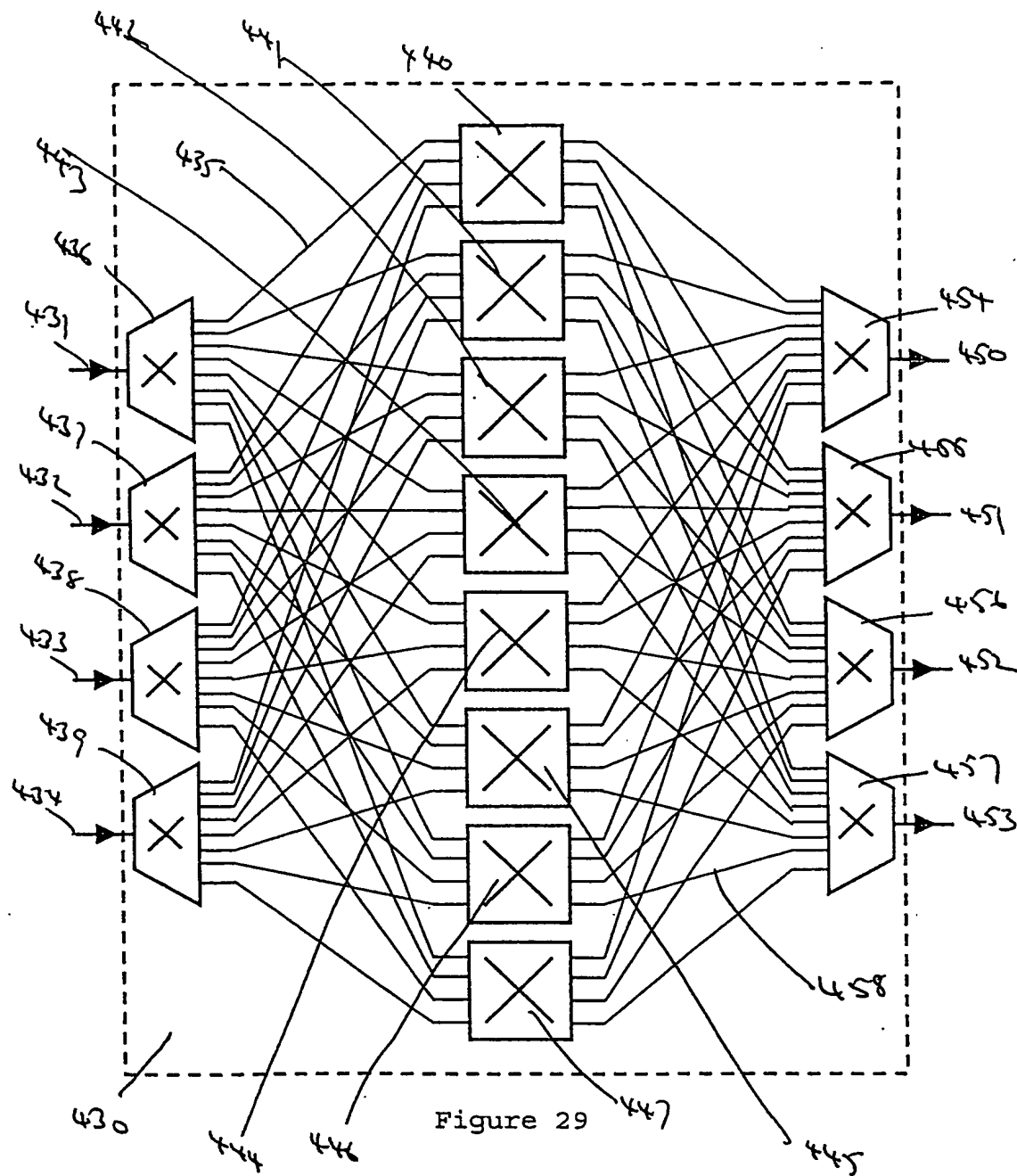
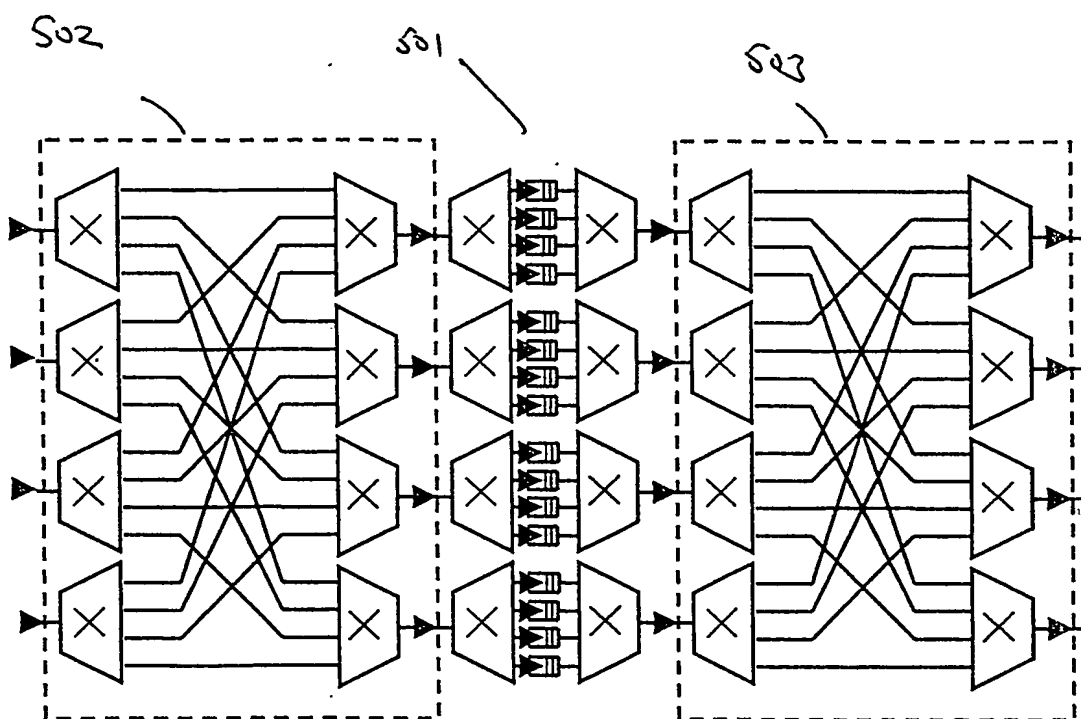
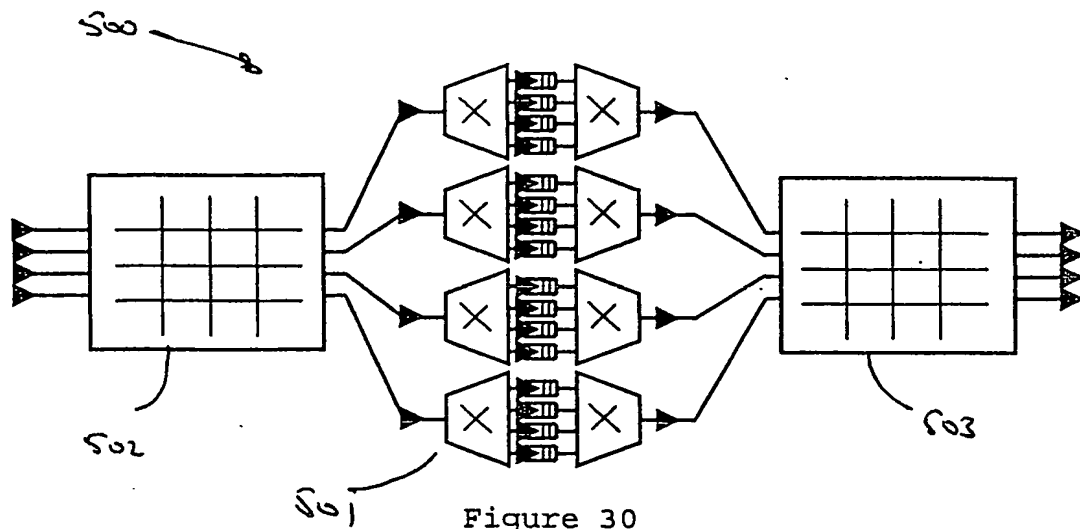
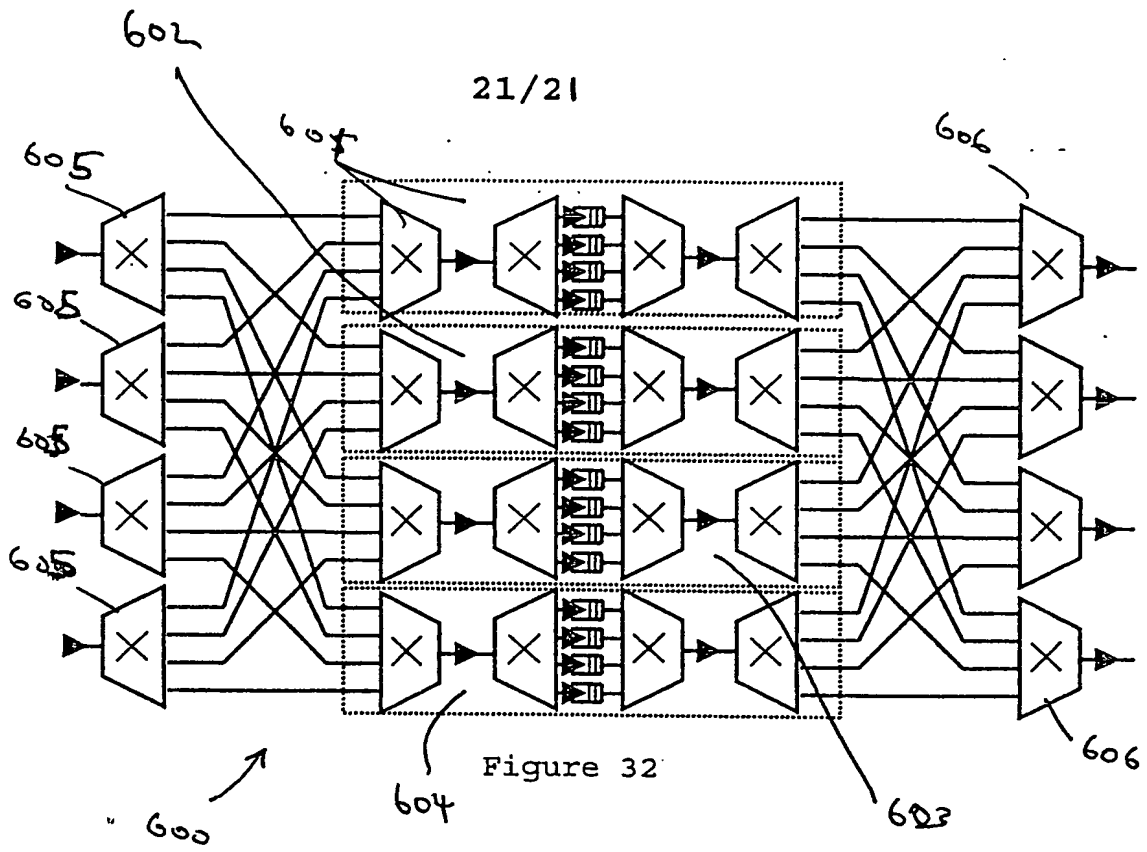


Figure 28







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